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LECTURES,

SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN DELIVERED,

BY THE AUTHOR OF A VIEW OF THE
INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

TO A SELECT COMPANY OF FRIENDS:

D E D I C A T E D

TO EDWARD GIBBON, ESQ.

Πρεπον εν εστι μη μονον καλειςθαι
Χριστιανως, αλλα και ειναι.

Ignatius ad Mag.

Και γαρ ται φιλοσοφιας ονομα και σχημα επιγραφονται τινες ου
αδεν αξιον της υποσχεσεως πρατλιναι.

Justini Apol. Prim.

L O N D O N :

Printed for G. G. J. and J. ROBINSON, Pater-noster Row.

M.DCC.LXXXVII.

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Humility,



C O N T E N T S.

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P R E F A C E

TO

THE READER.

RETIRING, one evening, to my study, I took up Mr. Soame Jennings' book on the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion. I had not read more than half an hour, before my thoughts were deeply engaged, in a very interesting meditation, on the present state of Christianity in the world. The time passed unobserved, beyond my usual hour of rest; and, being greatly fatigued by the engagements of the day, the power of sleep became irresistible, and I sunk under it: but, though it deranged my ideas, the object of my waking thoughts, in another perspec-

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tive, still presented itself to my imagination.

I fancied that I was in St. James's-Square, in an apartment of a certain noble Lord, who, it is well known, is sincerely attached to the principles of Christianity. I observed a large company of very respectable persons—some of them dignified by their high birth; and others equally distinguished by their great natural abilities and learning—philosophers, sceptics, Deists, and speculative professors of the christian religion. They had been assembled, by invitation from the noble Lord, to hear a Lecture, delivered by Mr. Jennings, on the belief and profession of Christianity; which after some desultory conversation on the subject, he pronounced

nounced from the *Motto* prefixed to his book on the internal evidence.

As soon as the lecture was finished, I observed a Deist in conversation with a Dignitary of the Church, who was one of the company, and heard him say, If the principles of Christianity were certainly true, they would justify a degree of zeal, equal to that, which had inspired the humane Mr. Howard to visit all the prisons in Europe, and the Lazarettos in the East--that Christianity proceeded on this supposition, That mankind are in a more deplorable condition, than the wretches, who are rotting in dungeons, or, perishing by the plague; and he thought, a cold assent to the gospel, and a supine, indolent profession of Christianity, accompanied with

an indifference to the moral miseries of human nature, and the propagation of this religion, utterly inconsistent * in them who believe; and sufficient

* “ For look on the various wild and uncivilized tribes of men, of whatever name or colour, which our ambition, or avarice, or curiosity has discovered, in the new or old world; and say, if the sight of human nature in such crying distress, in such sordid, disgraceful, and more than brutal wretchedness, be not enough to make us fly with order to their relief.

“ Surely, such a religion, as that of Jesus—deserves to be propagated through the world, and justifies, or rather demands the utmost zeal of its professors to spread it abroad among all nations.” *Bishop Hurd.*

The *auri sacra fames* of European Christians has established settlements, or formed commercial connections, in almost every part of the world. This, at first view, seems favourable to the most extensive propagation of the gospel: But, the bad examples, the wickedness of degenerate Christians, have such powerful influences, as must defeat

P R E F A C E. v

sufficient, of itself, to induce a persuasion, that the very advocates and professors

defeat every attempt of the pious Missionary. It is this, which damps his zeal, more than "the rage of climates, the inconvenience of long and perilous voyages, the drudgery of learning barbarous languages, or the disgust of complying with barbarous manners;" and, it may be questioned, whether the first preachers of Christianity surmounted obstacles, in any degree, equal to this, which now presents itself, every where, to the faithful minister. Another mighty discouragement is the readiness of this fastidious age, to pour contempt on every degree of true christian zeal, and to impute the most unworthy motives to the designs of the most sublime charity. Let "a fervent Love of Christ, and the quickening graces of his spirit inspire the faithful minister of the word, to go forth with the zeal of an Apostle; to forsake ease and affluence, a competency at least, and the ordinary comforts of Society; and with the gospel in his hand, and his Saviour in his heart, *enduring all things, becoming all things*, in the patient hope" of converting sinners, either apos-

professors of Christianity are *insincere*.

The

tate and degenerate Christians, or the benighted heathen—and, for one *candid Hurd*, who will “humble himself before such heroic virtue,” thousands in Christendom will rise up against him, throw every obstacle in his way, and, if he dare proceed, force him to endure the trial of cruel mockings. “But, when the duty is clearly enjoined * by the Redeemer himself; when no weapon is employed but that of the spirit; when the friendliest affections prompt our zeal; and the object in view is eternal life; when, I say, the authority is unquestionable, and the means blameless; the motives so pure, and the end so glorious—O! let not the hard heart of infidelity,” nor the harder heart of cold, systematic orthodoxy, “prophane such a virtue, as this, with the disgraceful name of *fanaticism*, or *superstition*.” When this virtue shall become a general (*Bp. Hurd*) characteristic of Christians; when it shall be esteemed the only essential qualification of Christian Ministers; when all, who are inspired by it, shall be regarded as

* Matth. 23. 19.

Evangelists

P R E F A C E. vii

The Clergyman answered—The principles of Christianity, he did not doubt, would bear the strictest examination; and he did not think it possible, to conceive too highly of the importance of this religion: “The precious hope of a Redeemer, “ he said, was the support of fallen “ man; the theme of all the Patri- “ archs; the basis of all the cove- “ nants; the boast and exultation “ of all the Prophets; and the de- “ sire of all nations—Salvation by “ the blood of Christ was the eter- “ nal purpose of God, the ultimate “ end of all his counsels”—therefore, worthy of all acceptance; and, for his part, he was willing it should be

Evangelists divinely sealed and authorized to preach the gospel; then, and not till then, will Christianity prosper and diffuse itself through the nations.

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The

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Evangelists

P R E F A C E. vii

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thought, that, whoever does not feel its importance, must either be ignorant of the doctrine of this salvation, or, though called a Christian, in fact, disbelieve the gospel.

This conversation, and the preceding lecture, had very much disconcerted several of those speculative Christians, who mistake orthodoxy for faith, and the decent economies of social life for Christian virtue. Two of them began speaking, at the same time—I heard the words *enthusiasm, faith, this enlightened age, and rational Christianity*, pronounced with some warmth of temper. Every one wished to hear what these gentlemen had to say for themselves: but, before I could fix my attention on one of them, a favourite spaniel, of
King

King *Charles's*-breed, barked at my study-door, to gain admittance, and disturbed my pleasing dream.

While the impression was strong upon my mind, I took my pen, and wrote as much of the lecture as I could recollect. I have often wished to renew the vision; but found it impossible, to put my thoughts again into the same train. The utmost I could do, to gratify my wish, was, by impressing my mind with a recollection of the visionary scene; and then, in my waking hours, endeavour to express, what, I might suppose, Mr. Jennings would say, on other important subjects, were he to deliver his sentiments upon them.

An acquaintance, to whose judgment I pay great regard, has seen these compositions; and persuaded me,

x P R E F A C E.

me, they might be useful, were they presented to the publick. In consequence of this, I now send them abroad ; hoping they will meet a favourable reception from the candid reader ; who never rejects with scorn a sincere attempt either to please or profit him.

This *visionary* account of the lectures is addressed to the reader, lest any one, who is not a judge of style and composition, should mistake the scholar for his master ; and, lest any one of greater discernment should impute to me the vain and presumptuous design of imposing these *supposititious* lectures on the publick, as the genuine productions of a more able writer.

THE REAL AUTHOR,

Jan. 6, 1787

LATUIT.

DEDICATION.

TO

EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.

SIR,

THOUGH your distinguished rank in the republick of letters be not above the reach of the keen eye of Envy, yet, so exalted, and so firmly established, is your station, the hand of Envy can never be raised high enough to tear the laurel from your brow; nor can malevolence detract, by secret whispers and insinuations, from that just honor which Fame proclaims aloud to the admiring world. I was no sooner acquainted with you, Sir, than I began to reverence your great abilities: but, when I had read your History of the Decline and Fall of the ROMAN Empire,

Empire, my ideas of you so far exceeded former impressions, that I seemed at a loss to determine, whether I discovered a new character, or had been guilty of injustice to your worth by thinking less highly of you, than was due to your merit. It will not, I hope, be difficult for you to pardon one who sincerely reveres your character, in regard to the liberty he takes in dedicating this little work to you; and to gratify his inclination to adorn it with your respectable name.

It will be thought, by some, that, in doing this, I am guilty of a great impropriety; and they will again surmise, that I am not in earnest in my attempt, [to vindicate revealed religion. Whatever has been thought, or said, of you by others, as a malicious

DEDICATION. xiii

licious enemy to Christianity, (hard words indeed!) is not to regulate my conduct, who am far from regarding you in that unfavourable light. As for the sincerity of my faith, God will judge another day: I have been told, that a certain Prelate said of me, "We must allow him to be a Christian; but, he is one *sui generis*." I admire the charity of a modern Bishop; and thank his Lordship for this instance of his goodness. Truly, I am neither a Roman Catholic, nor a High-Church-man; neither a Dissenter, nor a Methodist. I rejoice to see some portion of light in every sect; while I abhor that Babel of confusion, which ignorance, superstition, and pride, have erected in Christendom. I hope, I shall be found at last to be a true disciple. If

I believe that the sun, moon, and stars, were not made by Archimedes, and that the laws of nature were not established by Sir Isaac Newton ; but are truly the effects of infinite wisdom and power ; I am obliged by the same kind of evidence, to believe that Christianity was not the contrivance of men ; but is the revelation and power of God. And I am so far from being a mere speculative Christian, that could I obtain your great reputation as an author, with whatever else the whole world can give, it would weigh nothing with me, in comparison of my hope in Christ.

That Christianity has been greatly corrupted is pretty generally acknowledged ; and, it must be acknowledged too, that multitudes call themselves

themselves Christians, who have not any thing truly christian in them. Under this profession, the follies and vices of mankind, bigotry, superstition, enthusiasm, priestcraft, deceit, and fraud, pride, and ambition, hatred, and strife, appear infinitely more detestable than under any other name. And, it must be confessed, real Christians are men; and not gods, or angels. There are spots in the sun; and these have their infirmities. We are men of like passions with you, said a true disciple, who counted not himself to have attained perfection.

Your penetrating eye, Sir, has not only detected the various hypocrisies, which have lurked under the cloak of pretended Christianity; but has discerned the man, that is, the depravity

depravity of human nature, even in the real Christian. You were struck with the apparent inconsistency of character: the infirmities of human nature were magnified in your eye, through the medium of the christian profession; and you turned away in disgust, as from a monster, concluding that there is no essential difference in the professors of this religion; but, that they are all, without exception, fools, or madmen, or designing villains.

It was not possible for you, thus prejudiced, to discern, in any one, those qualities, which constitute the christian character: You could not see the true disciple humbled before God under a sense of those very infirmities for which you reprobate him: You could not perceive that quick apprehension

apprehension he feels of intire dependence on his God and Savior, or that acknowledgment of infinite obligation to the divine mercy, which freed him from guilt, and rescued him from the dominion of his lusts; and to which he owes all that he knows of God, and of himself, and all his hopes of immortality: It was not possible for you to have any idea of the war he is sensible of between the flesh and the spirit; or to admire the faithful struggle of a christian soldier even in his falls: The graces, which really constitute his character, as a Christian, either appear not at all, or, in your eye, appear distorted, or as blasted corn, which, instead of affording hope of a profitable harvest, makes you shrink back in fear of contamination.

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Indeed,

Indeed, were it not for Christianity, human nature had never appeared * so weak, or so wicked, as we now behold it. The moral diseases of the heathen seem mild, in comparison of the religious phrensy of some who have been called Christians: and pagan priestcraft looks like a simple and innocent device, compared with the deep-laid schemes of ecclesiastical domination of a set of men, who have obtained the name of *The Christian Clergy*. The fault is in our common nature; but, as Christianity has been the occasion of its appear-

* Something like this is the language of St. Paul: By the law is the knowledge of sin. I had not known sin, but by the law. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. Sin that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good—

ance,

ance, the fault is easily transferred to her; and she is reproached as the accursed parent of the vilest hypocrisy and madness, the blackest treason and usurpation, the most horrid cruelty and bloodshed, that ever polluted this earth. Viewing Christianity through this thick medium, it is not possible for any one to discern the divinity which is stamp'd upon her, or once to imagine that any degree of evidence can reasonably be thought sufficient to prove the divine origin of this religion, the profession of which has been attended with such monstrous iniquities and shameful weaknesses; and which has been the occasion (yet the innocent occasion) of producing the most pernicious effects. You therefore seem justified to yourself in

not attending to the evidences and wonders of this dispensation, to the nature and design of Christianity. Indeed, you could not conceive that there existed any other than that pretended Christianity, which is truly human, the offspring of folly and wickedness. Regarding this Religion, at the best, as a suspicious character, you listen to every suggestion and argument against her; and unhappily express yourself in such general terms, that many have concluded you are a determined enemy to real Christianity. But had you ever discerned the reality, instead of the counterfeit; so far from appearing as an enemy to revealed religion, your learning and your life had been devoted to her service: You had taken the pen out of
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my hand, and, as a philosopher, had more successfully exposed the principles of human error, and, as a Christian, had more worthily justified the ways of God to man.

That multitudes, perhaps the far greater number in every age, are not essentially the better for Christianity, and that it does not make any one perfectly good all at once, is, I think, no greater objection to this religion, than it is to the use of Peruvian bark, that it has not cured all intermittents; that many have been the worse by an improper use of it, and by using it when adulterated by knavish apothecaries; or that it has never restored any one to perfect health in an instant. Were it possible for you to have had an exact knowledge of mankind, and

have discerned the nature and design of Christianity, previous to its introduction into the world, you had prophesied that Christianity would be totally rejected by men, unless accompanied with a divine power; that, in general, it would meet with the same reception which it hath actually found, that is, would be received in hypocrisy by many and become greatly corrupted in a short space of time: you might perhaps, even then, have accounted for a rapid increase and propagation of this religion in its corrupted state on other principles * than that

* To account for the propagation of a corrupt state of Christianity, or of the mere external form of Christianity, on other principles than the interposition of supernatural power does not weaken the evidence, which has been repeatedly urged, from the establishment of Christianity in the world. Certainly

that of supernatural aid; you had fore-
seen the confusion of public affairs;
and, that influence it would produce
on the Roman state, which, in your
history, you have well described.

Nor are these things, Sir, any in-
convenience to my faith: Human na-
ture is what it is: and, I cannot con-
ceive, unless the state of the world
were totally different, that Christiani-
nity could be in any other condition

certainly there are *secondary* causes, by which we may
account for a rapid and vast increase of the profes-
sors of this religion, for we know that men may
be brought to assent to what they do not believe,
and whole nations have been baptised at the point
of a sword. The force of the evidence does not
consist in the numbers who are called Christians;
but in this, that there are any real Christians in the
world; for how any one profelyte could be gained
to genuine Christianity is impossible to be accounted
for, on any other principle than "Even so, Father,
" for so it seemed good in thy sight."

than that in which we find it. Besides, when I take into the account the express prophecies, that there should be a general apostacy, or departure from the faith, a mercenary priesthood, and a worldly kingdom established by ecclesiastical authority, I see such a wonderful coincidence of things, and such manifest tokens of a Providence, in the midst of all this darkness and confusion, that I acquiesce without a murmur; and, am more satisfied in seeing things just as they are, however much I deplore the evils, than I can fancy I should be in any other condition of them I can conceive, or wish to be.

But, when I consider what prodigious stumbling-blocks are in the way of other men, who cannot discern the links

links of this chain of causes and effects; when I consider how these things have struck your amiable sensibility, and to what a vast distance you recoil from every idea favourable to real Christianity, I am filled with the greatest concern. I pity you; and the more, because I am persuaded that whatever I, or any other, can say to you in a way of argument, will never make you a Christian. You are to me a striking example, that great parts and learning, philosophy and reason, will not only not tend to any one's conversion, but, in certain circumstances, greatly hinder it. Yet I am not absolutely without hope from another quarter, as I believe that whatever you have written, or insinuated, is not so much against

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Christianity itself, as against those monstrous appearances, which have sprung from human depravity, thro' which your mind has received the most unhappy prejudices. I did it ignorantly in unbelief *, said one, who

* “ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. But I obtained mercy, for “ I did it ignorantly in unbelief: and the grace of “ our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith, “ and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that “ Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; “ of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I “ obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might “ shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to “ them which should hereafter believe on him to “ life everlasting.” i Tim. i.

Had Saul, when he breathed out threatnings and slaughter against the disciples, and persecuted this way unto death, known what he was doing, that is, if he had been a determined enemy to Christianity against the convictions of his own mind, he had never

who was once a violent opposer, and afterwards preached the faith, which he had zealously endeavoured to destroy.

The only argument, by which you can ever be persuaded to become a true Christian, is that of necessity. If, by any means, you shall hereafter obtain a right view of the existence of moral evil, and of the reality of its existence in your ownself, you will then, and not till then, be

never found mercy; his sin had been that which is never repented of, and never forgiven, in this world, nor in that which is to come. But he went as near to the commission of this sin as a man can go, who is not actually guilty of it; and he was designed as a special example of that astonishing patience and mercy, which can pity and pardon *a determined enemy to Christianity*, when his enmity is the effect of prejudice, ignorance, and unbelief.

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in a way to become a true disciple of Jesus: You may then see the wonders of this dispensation, and embrace Christianity as a panacea for all the miseries of human nature. Nec quisquam aut peccatis retardetur, aut annis, quo minus veniat ad consequendam salutem. In isto adhuc mundo manenti, pœnitentia nulla fera est. Patet ad indulgentiam Dei aditus, et quærentibus atque intelligentibus veritatem facilis accessus est. Tu sub ipso licet exitu et vitæ temporalis occasu, pro delictis roges: et Deum qui unus et verus est, confessione et fide agnitionis ejus implores. Venia confitenti datur; et credenti indulgentia salutaris de divina pietate conceditur; et ad immortalitatem sub ipsa morte transitur. Hanc gratiam Christus
tus

tus impertit, hoc munus misericordiae suae tribuit, subigendo mortem trophæo crucis, redimendo credentem pretio sanguinis sui, reconciliando hominem Deo patri, vivificando mortalem regeneratione cœlesti. Hunc, si fieri potest, sequamur omnes: hic nobis viam vitæ aperit, hic ad paradysum reduces facit, hic ad cœlorum regna perducet. Cum ipso semper vivemus, facti per ipsum filii Dei: cum ipso exultabimus semper, ipsius cruore reparati. Erimus Christiani cum Christo simul gloriosi, de Deo patre beati, de perpetua voluptate lætantes semper in conspectu Dei, et agentes Deo gratias semper. Neque enim poterit nisi et lætus esse semper et gratus, qui cum morti fuisset obnoxius,

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noxius, factus est de immortalitate securus. *

It is, Sir, one of the sincerest wishes of my heart, “ That the God of our
“ Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of
“ Glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the
“ knowledge of him; the eyes of
“ your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is
“ the hope of his calling, and what
“ the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is
“ the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.” This wish, Sir, is accompanied with a hope concerning you, which is grounded on something more than the mere possibility, that you may be as bright

* Cyprianus ad Demetrianum.

DEDICATION. xxxi

an example in the christian church,
as you are an ornament in the republic of letters.

I am,

SIR,

Your sincere friend,

And humble servant,

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LECTURES

DEDICATION

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
SOCIETY OF THE
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LECTURES, &c.

LECTURE I.

THE PREJUDICE OF EDUCATION AND RATIONAL CONVICTION.

ALMOST THOU PERSUADEST ME TO BE A
CHRISTIAN. ACTS, xxvi. 28.

IF Christianity be, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interposition of supernatural power, it is worthy of all regard; and, the vast importance of it will justify every charitable attempt to propagate the knowledge of it in the world. It is on this ground, I expect to be excused, for assuming *a character which does not belong to me*, in order to express my

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views

views of a religion, the origin of which, I am persuaded, is divine. Nor do I encroach on the sacerdotal office more than did those great masters of reason and erudition, Grotius, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Lyttleton; who testified their belief to the world, without any other motive than their regard for truth and the benefit of mankind. Every one has, I think, a right; and is, in duty, obliged* to advance the interests of Christianity, which are indeed the most important interests of human nature, by every means consistent with its genius: and, if my mite shall contribute any thing towards persuading you to pay that attention to this divine religion,

“ He could have no motive for thus imparting his free
 “ sentiments to the Public, except the dictates of his own
 “ heart, which tell him, that it is *every man's duty*, who
 “ comes into the world, to *use his best endeavours*, however
 “ *insignificant*, to leave it as much wiser, and as much better
 “ as he can.”

Preface to A Free Enquiry into the Nature
 and Origin of Evil.

which

which it justly claims, the clergy will have no reason to be jealous of this attempt.

It may be thought that the general establishment of Christianity precludes every extraordinary attempt in its favor. This revelation, it is true, is the basis of almost every religion in Europe: but pure and genuine Christianity is not necessarily connected with any particular mode of external worship, or form of church-government. Something, which is called Christianity, may become the religion of a country, in which there is less real Christianity than was, seventeen hundred years ago, in any province of the Roman Empire. There may, therefore, at this time, be as much reason for every one, who values this divine religion, to exert himself in its favor, as there would be, if Paganism, in its various forms, were still the national religion of every country in Europe.

It is one thing to be called a Christian, and to profess, what is termed, the Christian religion as by law established; and, another

thing to be a Christian according to the spirit and tenor of the Christian dispensation. The vast multitudes called Christians, are not Christians *de jure*, having the principles and graces which essentially constitute the true Christian character; as is too evident by their vices and immoralities, their ignorance, superstition, profaneness, worldly pursuits, and engagements; but have a right to the denomination *de facto*, by virtue of custom, human laws, and certain religious rites superstitiously submitted to, and sometimes profanely administered.

The distinction is nearly as old as Christianity. You read of some *, and these Christian ministers, as they would seem to be, who were enemies of the cross of Christ, and minding earthly things; and therefore as remote from real Christianity as were the idolatrous nations. Reason too, as well as scripture, distinguishes between the form of god-

* Phil. iii. 15.

liness and the energy, or reality. The picture of a man is not a man. In the religions which have made Christianity their basis, you may discern some resemblance to real Christianity: but, if the resemblance were perfect, which is far from being true in fact, it must still be distinguished from real Christianity, as much as a shadow from its substance, or a picture from the man whose exact portrait it is. Acknowledge the masterly strokes of a Reynolds; admire the painting; say it expresses the original to the life, his features, and even his passions: it is yet no more than a resemblance of the person, whose character you may have just reason to admire, to love, and imitate.

The mass of mankind will ever take up, and be satisfied, with that religion which is made ready for them, and which happens to be the religion of their country. In Europe, they will fall into the profession of what is called The Christian Religion; in Asia, of that of Mahomet: they are Christians, be-

cause their progenitors professed to be Christians: if these had been Heathens, their religion had been Paganism; if Jews, or Mahometans, they had been circumcised, and blasphemed Christ, only because their forefathers had done so before them. But truth is the same, whoever has professed or denied it: yet so perverse are we, that we often shut our eyes against the light, for no other reason than because our forefathers could not see. Let it be supposed that our ancestors were right in their profession; that they were of the true religion; that they were real Christians: yet, if we be of the same profession, merely because it was theirs, or through the prejudice of education, we are not Christians in the best sense of that denomination; we are not so much as almost persuaded to be Christians. We have the name indeed; but not the thing: we profess, without any reasonable ground of persuasion; for if it be any reason in favor of Christianity, that it has been long professed by our forefathers, and is
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the religion of our country ; it is equally as good a reason against it, and would have justified the first converts to Christianity, if they had obstinately continued Jews and Pagans.

But there are men of genius and learning, who disdain vulgar prejudices : having some leisure, and more curiosity, and perhaps prompted by a laudable desire of character, or persuaded by secular interest, they exert their superior abilities in a strict examination of the Evidences of the Christian religion. Truth and candor oblige them to acknowledge, that an equal degree of evidence never appeared, to confirm any historical facts, which ever were presented to the faith of mankind ; and, that they would be inexcusable, were they to withhold their avowed assent to the gospel, which carries with it such a prodigiously high degree of probability. They find this religion disengaged from those gross superstitions, which deform every other institution ; and the morality of the gospel truly

truly excellent. They therefore compliment this religion with the first place in their scale of comparison with all others, as the best religion in the world; and profess to be converts to Christianity on rational conviction. Not a few of them, and these men of the greatest abilities, and holding the first rank in the schools of science, ambitious to distinguish themselves, and zealous of those opinions, which, after painful investigation, have formed their creed, engage as volunteers in the croisade; while others of them, as soldiers of fortune, fighting for pay, the emoluments of office, maintain the out-works of Christianity, and repel the attacks of learned infidels. If it would be presumptuous to say, that none of these are real Christians; it is, however, no presumption to say, There is not any necessity obliging us to suppose that any of them are more so, than those whose faith is the mere prejudice of education, or, than the infidels whom they oppose. The actors on the public theatre do not so perform

form their parts in assumed characters, as utterly to disguise their own, or to induce a belief that they are really the persons whom they represent for an hour. Even a Garrick was never taken to be the identical Richard the Third; nor is a Siddons mistaken for a real penitent Jane Shore. And it is easily seen that many, who assume the Christian character, are at variance with their own professions; their tempers and conduct absolutely inconsistent with the genius of this religion; and, it is therefore justly concluded, that these rational Christians, as they call themselves, are essentially deficient; many of whom are entirely ignorant of the nature of that very religion, which they are engaged to defend, and which they profess to believe is of divine original.

I mean not here to depreciate their merits. In the wonderful chain of beings, they are as much above vulgar Christians, as these are above the brutal Hottentots. As far as they go, they are certainly right: but it is equally certain,

certain, that so far they may go without any one principle of the Christian institution. Professing to believe, they may deceive others; but, if they think they believe, it is most likely they will deceive themselves; for, it is one thing to have an assent to the truth of Christianity extorted by dint of argument, and to believe, on rational conviction, that the Bible contains a divine revelation; and quite another, to understand the nature of that revelation, and be delivered into the mould of the gospel, and to take the impression and character of Christ.

The scriptures afford many examples to confirm the truth of these observations. The Jews had schools and seminaries of learning; in which, we must suppose, every argument the wit of man could devise in favor of revelation, was investigated and carefully taught: indeed their learned labours in the scriptures were prodigious. It is probable King Agrippa believed the prophets after an examination of the external evidences of revealed

vealed religion, and some partial views of the internal evidences of it; but, how far he was from being, in any sense, an Israelite indeed, is too evident. Our Saviour charged the Jews with unbelief with respect to the very writings of Moses, in whom they trusted: They knew not the voices of the prophets, in the reading and studying of whose sacred books, their learned education chiefly consisted, and which were read every sabbath-day in their synagogues. These Jews, who troubled the churches of Galatia, and many other, by seeing the completion of ancient prophecies and the miracles wrought by the apostles, were convinced that the Messiah was come, and were baptized in the name of Jesus; yet, so far were they from being Christian, from having their hearts conformed to the Christian dispensation, that they quite mistook the real character of Christ: they were still seeking to be justified by their own merits, and zealously taught, that, except a man be circumcised and keep the Law

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of Moses, he cannot be saved ; than which, the philosophy of Greece and the idolatry of the Gentiles were not more inconsistent with the gospel, which proclaims Jesus Christ the only mediator between God and man.

That persuasion, by which men become real Christians, is very different from an assent to philosophical and historical truths, or to things credible on testimony of credible witnesses. We may assent to philosophical and historical truths, on the relation of other men, as general truths in which we are not immediately concerned ; or, the importance of which, as relating to ourselves, we do not apprehend ; and so these are matters of mere speculation, and not regarded by us, or, not so regarded as their importance may require. Thus the curious enquirer concerning revealed religion may regard it only according to its importance in his scale of comparison with every other institution, without understanding, in any degree, its real importance to himself. He may examine

mine the evidences of Christianity, so far as to be persuaded that it is from God, without understanding the nature and design of Christianity; and so, without regarding it according to what it really is, that is, without being Christian. The evidences, which authenticate the Bible, as containing a divine revelation, force from him a cold assent: he attends to those truths, which, though implied by the gospel, are not the grand peculiarities of it; but, are as much the principles of natural as of revealed religion; and, he professes a high veneration for the gospel as a system of ethics, the moral part of Christianity, which is, in fact, no characteristic part of it at all; as this, though in a manner less perfect, makes a part of every religion that ever appeared in the world.

Of necessity, Christ must be regarded in the light in which the scriptures represent his character; for, if he be not regarded in that respect, in which his character as a Savior essentially

essentially* consists, he is indeed not regarded at all, to any purpose of salvation. The Jews, according to their mistaken view of the scriptures, believe in a Christ, whom they expect to redeem and save them: and we may as well affirm that the modern apostate Jews are real Christians, as suppose that many of the learned advocates of Christianity are so, whose views of the nature of this dispensation are so partial and indistinct, that they either mistake, or reject, the true † character of our Savior.

* It is not every error, or every heresy, that is apostasy from the faith. It is a revolt in the principal and essential article.

—And the denial of such an essential part may as properly be called *apostacy*, as if we were to renounce the whole Christian faith and worship. It is renouncing them in effect, and not treating and regarding God as God, or Christ as Christ.

Newton's Dissertations.

† Εάν τις λεγῇ μὲν ἕνα Θεόν, ὁμολογῇ δὲ καὶ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, φίλον δὲ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι νομίζῃ τὸν Κυρίον, ἡχὶ Θεὸν μονογενῆ, καὶ σῶφιν, καὶ λόγον Θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σαρκὸς ἀνθρώπου εἶναι νομίζῃ, ὁ τοιοῦτος ὅστις ἐστὶν ἀπάλην καὶ πλανήν κηρύττων ἐστ' ἀπώλεια ἀνθρώπων.

Ignatius ad Philad.

From

From the foregoing premises, I conclude, that a man is not so much as almost persuaded to be a Christian, when he is prejudiced in favor of Christianity by his education in a country where Christianity happens to be the general profession; nor when he is a Christian religionist believing, what is called, The Christian Religion to be the best religion in the world; nor when he acknowledges a divine revelation, persuaded to this acknowledgment by rational arguments; and, much less, when his own private temporal convenience and advantage make him ready to think well of it, and to profess it: but, then he is almost persuaded, when the light of Christian truth is breaking in upon his mind; when the nature and importance of Christianity are opening to his view, and he is inclined, in some degree, to embrace it; but the love of the world, or pride, tempts him to close his eyes, to stifle his convictions, to quench the spirit, to turn from the truth, to neglect, slight, mistake, and pervert it. At times,

times, he is almost persuaded, and half resolved; but is kept back from a cordial, universal regard to Jesus: his convictions, like a thorn in the foot, disable him from pressing forward in the careless, or presumptuous, course he formerly pursued: in theory, perhaps, he renounces all dependence on his own merits, on the form of out-side religion, and on the world as the object of his happiness; yet, Christ is not formed in him; nor will Christianity gain any credit by millions of such professors of it. These are the men who halt between God and Mammon; who, when the scorching sun is up, in time of temptation, turn apostates; or, by more lingering declensions, fall away; or, constantly sinning against light, and especially by repeated breaches of their vows and resolutions, pave their way to greater condemnation and accumulated ruin. “In them is
“fulfilled the Prophecy of Isaiah, who saith,
“By hearing ye shall hear, and not under-
“stand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not
“perceive:

“perceive : for this people’s heart is waxed
“gross, and their ears are dull of hearing,
“and their eyes have they closed ; lest at
“any time they should see with their eyes
“and hear with their ears, and should under-
“stand with their heart, and be converted,
“and I should heal them.”

Such was the case of King Agrippa : he was almost persuaded to be a Christian. What could it have been that kept him back ! It was the world ; the love of the world. To his heart, disposed as it then was, its frowns and persecutions were more shocking than the distant apprehension of hell ; and, its honors, riches, and pleasures, weighed more with him, than the approbation of Heaven, and the hope of future glory. He yielded to the dictates of his conscience, so far as he could consistently with his character, as a man of the world ; and, through an affectation of candor, in quest of praise, acknowledged that St. Paul had done nothing worthy of death, or of bonds ; yet, against

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his conscience, and to keep fair with the world, left him unbefriended to the judgment of Cæsar.

There is little occasion for cautioning you against mistaking national prejudice for Christian faith. Men of sense, who have had the privilege of a liberal education, have ever despised the superstition of the vulgar, or revered it only as a support of government and a fortunate bond of human society. Your danger lies in a readiness to mistake the conclusions of reason for the faith of the gospel. Under pretence of avoiding enthusiasm, and to represent Christianity more rational, the standard of modern Christianity requires no more than an hearty assent to the credibility of revealed religion: take a ritual in your hand, as a help to devotion; and, let your manners be decent; and, you are as completely Christian as the world requires you to be. But, if you would be Christians according to the standard which God hath fixed, you must be what the world ever will despise:

you must begin with poverty of spirit; for, the faith of the Gospel is the contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit; and originates in an humble, teachable, and candid disposition: and after exploring the mystery of Christ's sufferings and death, as the price of your peace, as your redemption from all that weight of woe which flesh is heir to; as your emancipation from sin, your restoration to perfect liberty, to virtue, and goodness, and eternal life; your hearts must come wholly attached to the Savior: him you must prefer to the whole world, and to your very life; in him you must confide, and to him must you live and die. Any thing short of this is not worthy of Christ, and will never pass for Christianity, when you come into that light in which specious appearances can no more deceive.

Since rational conviction and systematical orthodoxy have obtained the name of Faith, elevation of thought and warmth of affection have been called enthusiasm: but, so

vastly great, and so important to us, is the object of the gospel, that it justly requires the most elevated mind, and the most fervent affection that ever glowed in man. That zeal which arises from wrong principles, and, which appears in unwarrantable practices, may justly be termed enthusiasm; but, true Christian zeal and love can never exceed, or merit that reproachful name. To give a cold assent to the gospel, to be indifferent and lukewarm in such a cause as the Christian, is to pour contempt upon it; to affront the Supreme Being; to undervalue the Savior; to turn the back on divine mercy; and will as effectually prevent the benefits of Christ's death, as an infidel opposition to the gospel.

Long observation of men and things obliges me to think, that it is no uncommon case, for those who hear, or read, the gospel, to be half inclined to it, and almost persuaded to be Christians; yet, intangled by the world and sin, and under the influence of pride,

they hang in a state of miserable suspense ; and sometimes become quite hardened against conviction. These perish at the very threshold of mercy, and under a degree of guilt the most aggravated. While you hear this, your own consciences will suggest, Beware of this fatal error. If there were a few more true Christians in the world, it would be happy for themselves, and by no means detrimental to the public ; and I would to God, that all who hear me were not only almost, but altogether Christian.

LECTURE II.

THE CAUSES OF INFIDELITY.

HAVE ANY OF THE RULERS, OR OF THE
PHARISEES, BELIEVED ON HIM?

JOHN vii, 48.

THERE is a certain temper of soul, called in scripture *A new heart*, which is absolutely necessary, as a suitable soil, for the divine plant of faith in Christ; without which it cannot strike root, or thrive.

The rulers of this world, all those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury, can never sufficiently attend to the evidences and wonders of the Christian dispensation: they cannot know any thing of this religion, except
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what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation, or superficial reading; or by a general review of the state of Christendom, than which there is not a more unlikely mean to impress the mind with sentiments in its favor. For want of evidence and inclination to believe, they determine with themselves, that Christianity is a pretended revelation, founded on a strange, improbable story; is nothing more than the imposition of priestcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages; and artfully continued, as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious vulgar. To talk to such about the Christian religion, is to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting: they want all ideas relative to the subject, and can never be made to comprehend it. The preaching of "Christ crucified, was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" and so it must appear to all, who, like them,

judge from established prejudices, false learning, and superficial knowledge.

If any one be attached to a favorite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits, incompatible with the precepts of this religion, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, if he believe; or, should he be determined neither to repent or reform, he must persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction: therefore such generally commence unbelievers in their own defence; for the most unfurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests *. Let the evidences of Christianity be supposed to be ten thousand times stronger than they are; let it be supposed, that, instead of appearing

* Let never so much probability hang on one side of a covetous man's reasoning, and money on the other, it is easy to foresee which will outweigh.—Tell a man, passionately in love, that he is jilted; bring a score of witnesses of the falshood of his mistress, it is ten to one but three kind words of her shall invalidate all their testimonies.

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to his disciples after his resurrection, Christ had appeared to the Jewish Sanhedrim; and to the Roman Senate; and, that these gentlemen, so attached to the world, should actually see miraculous cures performed on the sick, or even the dead raised to life, they might be staggered for a while, but would not be effectually persuaded to believe; for we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over that of the body, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us.

If the evidences of Christianity, its doctrines and precepts, which are perfectly opposite to their inclinations, be zealously and authoritatively urged upon their consciences, they then grow angry and enraged, and persecute the truth in its professors and advocates. "Ye would take away our Gods; and what have we more?" But, if these gentlemen, so entirely devoted to the world, happen to be of a timid or indolent disposition, and have not sufficient resolution to commence

commence infidels, while all around them profess to believe the truth of Christianity, and while its evidences are vindicated by men of learning and reputed integrity, they then coldly assent to the truth which they want abilities and resolution to oppose, and shelter themselves under plausible pretexts to justify their pursuits, and to quiet their disturbed consciences; and so, while they profess Christianity, have not any thing peculiarly, or truly Christian in them.

It was very natural to suppose that the Pharisees, who had always expressed a wonderful zeal for God and religion, would have embraced the gospel, after they had seen the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles. But, by their exceeding great zeal for the traditions of the fathers, and by an exact observance of all the duties of religion, human and divine, they had acquired that degree of reputation and power, which nobility, wealth, and learning obtain in other countries; and being wholly attached to their
interests

interests founded on the old religion, they could not possibly receive the gospel, which would subvert the very foundation on which their importance rested. "How can ye believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor which cometh of God only?" Besides, by that association of ideas so well described by Mr. Locke, they easily persuaded themselves that those works, which made them appear righteous before men, would justify them in the sight of God, and gain that importance in the next world, of which they found themselves possessed in this; a presumption, which absolutely prevented their seeing any want of such an expedient as the interposition of a suffering Messiah.

I make these observations on the Pharisees, because all mere moralists, and religionists of every denomination, are exactly in the same predicament. There is a line of distinction, though bigots can never discern it, between real Christianity, and every form of religion
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in Europe. Popery and Christianity, and Protestantism and Christianity, are by no means synonymous terms: whoever thinks otherwise must reprobate every person of every other sect than that which he himself approves. And this seems to be the general disposition, though not so generally owned; for it is strongly implied in that zeal, which almost every one discovers for the peculiarities of the sect to which he adheres. Men are politically Papists, Churchmen, or Dissenters; and the honor and importance, which they acquire by their party zeal, exclude that regard for the gospel, which if entertained, would at once demolish all their distinctions and importance in the world. And, while they are thus attached to their religion, they imperceptibly cherish a vain confidence in their own merits. St. Paul affirmed, it was a certain mark that an unchristian spirit had crept into the Corinthian churches, "whereas there were divisions amongst them. One said, I am of Paul; another, " I am

"I am of Appollos; another, I am of Cephas; another, I am of Christ:" so that even to be of Christ, in the same respect that another was of Paul, or of Appollos, or of Cephas, was to be unchristian, or, as he termed it, *carnal*. It was pride, self-conceit, and a desire to establish personal merit in the place of Christ's mediation; for this is what the scriptures mean by being carnal, which divided the church of Corinth, and which has now split Christendom into a thousand sects. Indeed it cannot signify any thing, in this respect, whether a man be a Stoic Philosopher, a Pagan, a Jew, a Mussulman, a Papist, or a Protestant; for, whoever hath not his heart humbled, and does not properly acknowledge his guilt, cannot possibly, in the nature of things, truly receive the gospel. Therefore, while some of this description renounce Christianity absolutely, which is by far the most consistent conduct, many others, who, through prejudice, or convenience, profess Christianity, are disposed, and indeed obliged,

obliged, to overlook, explain away, or slight the doctrine of Christ in the very point where- in Christianity essentially consisteth; and have no more proper regard for Christ than professed infidels; for, who will ever regard a thing, which doth not appear to be necessary or suitable for him?

The scriptures represent such as seek justification by the law, which, whether they understand the terms or not, all do, who trust in their own merits, in a state of enmity against God: they stand in full opposition to the counsel, or will of Heaven appointing the mediation of Jesus Christ, in default of our righteousness, as the only way to pardon, peace, and life. And it must needs be so; for they who are whole need not a physician; and such as conceit they need him not, will undoubtedly reject his assistance. "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

And here we see the reason, why unbelief is described so full of guilt, and attended with the dreadful consequence of final perdition;

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not because it is simple ignorance, mistake, or an opinion grounded on defective evidence; but, because it is occasioned by vile attachments, springs from an unhumiliated heart, from the most malignant of all principles, pride; and because it implies a rejection of the only remedy which infinite wisdom hath thought proper to ordain. This view of things justifies that prodigious concern, which St. Paul expressed for his countrymen, who, seeking to establish their own righteousness would not *submit* themselves unto the righteousness of God; for opposition to the way of salvation, through pride, must be big with ruin.

From these premises, the reason is evident why it is so constantly asserted, that men must be regenerate, be born again, be converted, become babes, little children, and new creatures, before they can be true Christians. Their minds must be formed for the conception of those ideas which relate to the subject of the gospel, by contemplation, retirement,

tirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation, by ill-health, disappointments and distresses, and by divine interposition making them acquainted with their own hearts, their guilt and depravity, and humbling them in the view of these. Without such preparatory aids, it is impossible that they can think or know, understand or believe, any thing about it; "for the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

A real Christian is, in a moral sense, so truly a new creature, that one species of animals differs not so much from those of another kind, as the true disciple of Jesus, from all the rest of mankind, and particularly from every one in the various herds of mere nominal Christians. If an inhabitant of some distant part of this globe, where the animals which range in Africa and Europe are never seen, having heard an exact description of the
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half-reasoning elephant and the generous horse, were afterwards shewn the filthy swine, the cunning fox, or the dull ass; and were told that these were the animals of which he had heard so great things; what would be his astonishment? And would he not justly conclude, that either the description was entirely false, or, that these are not the animals which they are said to be? And it is equally certain, that either the scriptures describe Christianity what it never was, or, Christians, so called, are not Christians according to the holy scriptures. They, who are devoted to pleasure, who are filled with wordly cares, ambitious of honor, riches, and power, are no more like Christians than the filthy swine, or the cunning fox, resembles the majestic elephant: and, it is as certainly true, that whoever trusts in himself that he is righteous, whether he be a mere moralist, or a religionist, has no more the spirit of Christianity in him, than an obstinate ass has the temper of a mountain-Arabian; for self-sufficiency, or

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confidence in our own merits, is as incompatible with faith in him that was crucified for us, as the love of the world, and the most sensual indulgences are inconsistent with the Christian hope of eternal life.

Yet it is not to be supposed that the fault is altogether in the people; as if the heavenly plant of faith, with its genuine fruits, were wanting only for want of a proper soil. If the ground be cursed with natural barrenness; if, of itself, it will never produce any thing but noxious, or useless weeds; it may however be capable of vast improvements by cultivation, and the very nature of the soil be changed by a course of good husbandry. If the moral husbandman diligently use the means which Heaven has ordained, he may reasonably expect that a good increase will reward his labors. But it is to be feared, that, amongst the causes of infidelity, this is a principal one, Proper means have not been used by those whose office it is, to mend the soil and propagate Christianity in the world.

LECTURE II.

PART II.

IT is very remarkable that, notwithstanding all the learned defences of Christianity, with which the present age abounds; and notwithstanding the weekly lectures from the pulpit on the duties we owe to God and one another; infidelity and immorality are spreading fast and wide. Philosophy and commerce have polished our manners; our luxuries, and even our vices, are more refined, than the middle ages of the church; but there is reason to fear that Christianity, for the most part, though not wholly, is banished from the mass of professors: the scriptures are laid aside as the fountain and the umpire of truth *;

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* "It is obvious that there is in the present age a lamentable propensity to catch at every little circumstance
"that

all zealous attachment to Christ, as the proper atonement for sin, is now ridiculed, and the hope of eternal life in his blood denominated hypocrisy and enthusiasm; a wide latitude of indulgence in voluptuousness, such as the primitive Christians had no notion of, is pleaded for; vice is no more kept out of sight as that pernicious, ugly thing, which the friends of virtue have represented it to be; and, (which the scriptures describe to be at once the sign and punishment of apostacy) a contempt of marriage as the ordinance of Heaven, fornication, adulteries, divorces, and the very sin of Sodom, make an alarming progress in Christendom.

But why are these things so? Is God departed from the earth? Will his blessing no more attend the labors of his ministers? Or, shall we say, The advocates and preachers of

“that may be turned to the disadvantage of the sacred records, and throw things into that obscurity which may be favorable to philosophical scepticism.”

Physiological Disquisitions, by W. Jones, F.R.S.
Christi-

Christianity have not used proper means, such as will engage mankind, and which God hath promised to prosper with his blessing?

There is a remarkable difference between the preaching of the apostles and of modern divines. Those preached Christianity as absolutely necessary to men's salvation; these, only as comparatively the best religion in the world: the apostles did not hesitate to say, The whole world is become guilty before God; every man is in a most ruinous condition, and will be finally undone, unless he believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, unless he embrace the gospel as a way of salvation by Christ crucified for us. Our modern divines affect a greater degree of candor and tenderness: they *charitably* hope that Deists and Christians will meet safe at last *: they

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* See a striking instance in a late publication by Dr. Samuel Horsley. In the conclusion of his charge, the Archdeacon expresses his *charitable* hope that orthodox and heretic MAY AT LAST FIND EQUAL MERCY. In the

think however, or seem to think, that the Christian profession is a better, perhaps a safer,
way

the name of common sense, why so much labor to convince us of Dr. Priestley's errors, if, after all, it is an indifferent thing whether a man be sincerely in earnest to own, or to deny, the Lord that bought him? Dr. P. may well admire the conclusion of this learned charge; for he has discernment enough to see, that all the preceding arguments are utterly insignificant, if the Archdeacon's charity is just. If Dr. P.'s opposition to the glory of our Lord, and his renunciation of all hope in "the power of that blood, which was shed equally for all," may be "referred to the fascinating power of prejudice," or may be supposed to have been done "ignorantly in unbelief," let charity hope and pray for his conversion, and endeavor to effect it by a manifestation of the truth to his conscience. "Admit much more than a possibility, that Dr. P. may be in earnest in all his misinterpretations of the scriptures and fathers, and in all his misinterpretations of facts;" so were the Jews, who also had a zeal for God which was not according to knowledge; and for whom the charitable St. Paul had continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart. If charity be pained with the idea of the swift destruction, which, they who deny the Lord that bought them, are bringing upon themselves, let her weep over the unhappy beings, and lament the ruin, which she would, but cannot prevent. "If
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way to happiness in a future state than any other; and, therefore, kindly endeavor to convert infidels. To accomplish this end, instead of shewing that the Christian religion contains things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" to conceive; but which the state of human nature makes necessary to our salvation; and thereby proving its divine origin, and commanding attention and regard to it with infinite authority---instead of this, they strip Christianity of all its grand peculiarities, or carefully disguise them by sophistical criticism, and even join infidels in reprobating them as enthusiastic notions. The design is to make Christianity appear

"thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace"---This is charity: but it is not charity, it is philosophical presumption, which gives the lie to God's word, which makes the preaching of the gospel vain, and faith also vain.

more rational*: they would persuade us that Christianity is natural religion improved by revelation, a more perfect kind of Deism.

The apostolic way of preaching was interesting; it engaged attention; and, if once the doctrine was believed, it engaged the heart: but that method which our divines have been pursuing, lessens in our view the importance of Christianity, and teaches us to regard it with the utmost indifference. If Christianity be not absolutely necessary, there is great reason to doubt whether its origin be divine: there is too little importance in the affair to suppose such an extraordinary interposition of Providence credible. Would God give a revelation, if natural religion could serve our turn? But, granting the truth of revealed religion, if yet it be not absolutely necessary, why trouble ourselves about it, since without it we may be safe and happy?

* It is perfectly rational: but then, it can never be made to appear rational, without making it appear what it is not, to a certain description of men. See 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Will

Will God condemn us for doubting the truth of a religion, the most material parts of which we have already? Thus by keeping out of sight the importance of Christianity, it has received a fatal blow, and is more effectually ruined, though by slow, and almost imperceptible degrees, than it could be by any direct opposition whatever. The very way which human wisdom has taken to make men Christians, has multiplied infidels, within the pale of the church, as well as without; for, by this modern priest-craft, multitudes are persuaded to fancy and profess themselves Christians, who are Deists in reality.

Whatever happens to be the religion of any country, the generality of people will be prejudiced in its favor, and implicitly believe it is divine. Self-love will not suffer us to suspect the traditions of our fathers; for this would be supposing ourselves in an error, and hurt our pride; and would put us to the trouble of examination; which sloth, a love of ease, and a multiplicity of engagements, will not

not permit. We therefore shut our eyes against the light, catch at every shadow of argument in favour of our opinions, and embrace the very apparition of truth for truth itself: whatever is plausible is sufficient to justify our prejudices. Thus men become Christians; and it would not be polite, or agreeable to modern charity, to question the reality of their professions: the clergy address them as Christians, call upon them to live agreeably to the precepts of the gospel, and then seem astonished that so few walk worthy of their holy profession. But, it would be more astonishing, considering what human nature is, and what Christian morals are, if, in such circumstances, men did lead Christian lives. If the peculiar doctrines of Christianity be taken for granted, as sufficiently known or attended to; or, if, by any means, they be not constantly insisted on; if they be explained away; and natural, or philosophical principles represented for them; it will be to little purpose

pose to praise the beauty of holiness, and a good life. Let the advocates of Christianity prove their religion to be the best in the world; let the clergy praise their establishment as the best ecclesiastical constitution; let them preach against vice, and extol the merit of good works; there is not any thing in all this that can awaken the powers of the human soul; men will still be children of the world; sin will still live in them, and they can never, in this way, be made any thing better than hypocrites, or mere formalists in religion.

The fashionable preaching is to represent Christianity as the best religion in the world; it is asserted that men, even in the present state of things, need nothing more, to recommend them to the Supreme Being, than to be good and virtuous; and, through an affectation of that candor, or charity, which is the spawn of infidelity, it is supposed, that men may be truly good and virtuous in any religion: it signifies little, it seems, whether
they

they worship Jehovah, Jove, or Lord ; it is asserted too, that there is no certainty of salvation to be attained in this life ; we are only to hope, in the mercy of God, that he will make great allowances for human frailties, and pardon our offences on the merit of repentance. Here the Deist can never see any thing to bring his heart into captivity to the obedience of Christ ; for this, substantially, is his religion already : neither can the common professors of Christianity be influenced to yield themselves unto Christ, and to engage their whole souls in the Christian profession, for sufficient motives. When any system, or modes of thinking, or of external worship, are in question, they may contend with the zeal of party, and yet be infinitely removed from Christian zeal and godliness.

The strongest natural abilities, the most profound learning, the most subtil reasonings on moral truth, the deepest researches in the science of metaphysics, are not sufficient to
persuade

persuade a man practically to believe in God. The metaphysical proofs of God, says *M. Pascal*, are so “very intricate, and so far removed from the common reasonings of men, that they strike with little force: or, at best, the impression continues but a short space, and men, the very next hour, fall back into their old jealousies, and their perpetual fear and suspicion of being deceived. All the arguments of this abstracted kind are able to lead us no farther than to a speculative knowledge of God; and to know him only thus, is, in effect, not to know him at all.---All they who seek God without Jesus Christ can never meet with such light in their inquiries, as may afford them true satisfaction, or solid use. For either they advance not so far as to know that there is a God; or if they do, yet they arrive hereby but at an unprofitable knowledge, because they frame to themselves a method of communicating with God, without a mediator: so that
“they

“ they unavoidably fall either into Atheism,
“ or Deism, things which the Christian reli-
“ gion does almost equally detest and abhor.”

To be good, men must believe the gospel; and, there must be a moral predisposition of the heart, by which they become willing to look into it; and whoever does so in truth most assuredly will embrace it. The purpose of God is to produce moral good; perhaps the greatest possible quantity of it. And it is the gospel, which he has ordained, and which he has promised to prosper with his blessing, as the fittest mean, perhaps the only mean, in the present condition of human nature, to accomplish his gracious purpose. It hath in itself a tendency to make all, who have believed in God, careful to maintain good works: for it contains such a discovery of moral evil, and of the vanity of the world; it affords such a view of human guilt and helplessness, of death, of judgment, and of a future state; it is such a display of the divine perfections, and contains such motives
to

to grateful returns, in obedience to the will of Heaven, as cannot fail to affect the human soul.---When Christ is in us the hope of glory, we then accord with the truth of things; we stand in that relation to Christ which has the promise of life; and this hope will purify from temporal, private, selfish considerations; from impatience, wrath, and malice; from pride, self-sufficiency, and from all dependence on our own merits: God is seen to be that Being which he is; and, that gracious Being which he is in Christ Jesus; hence humility, repentance, forsaking of sin, detachment from the world, love, gratitude, universal obedience to all God's commandments, and charity towards all men.

The apostles therefore never dreamt of proselyting the world to virtue by excellency of speech, or philosophic wisdom; for, as the gospel rests entirely on the authority of divine revelation, philosophy can have nothing to do with it, except to corrupt, pervert, or oppose it. They preached Christ cruci-

crucified; and this St. Paul affirmed to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; and he exhorted the Colossians to beware of the pernicious allurements of philosophy. And it is as much from a knowledge of facts, as of the reason of things, that I venture to say, A more certain method, to banish Christianity from a people, could never be devised, than philosophical discourses on the Being and attributes of God, on the nature of man, and a future state; nor could the most malignant spirits with the Clergy to adapt any method, better calculated to destroy all regard for virtue, than preaching virtue on any other principles than those which are purely Christian.

“ We ought therefore wholly to direct our
“ inquiries to the knowledge of Jesus Christ,
“ because it is by him alone we can pretend to
“ know God, in such a manner as shall be
“ really advantageous to us. He is our chief
“ centre and supreme object, in respect of all
“ that we can wish, and all that we can understand.

"derstand. Whoever knows not him,
 "knows nothing either in the order of the
 "world or in his own nature and con-
 "dition. In him consists all our happi-
 "ness, and all our virtue, our life and
 "light, our hope and assurance: out of him
 "there is no prospect but of sins and mise-
 "ries, of darkness and despair; nothing to be
 "beheld by us but obscurity and confusion in
 "the divine nature and in our own *."

My aim is to direct you to that wisdom
 which is justly called the *TO VITEPEXOV THS YVWGENS*
ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ †; and, if possible, to convince you that
 Christianity is not an indifferent thing,
 which you may receive, or reject without
 danger; but that there is a necessity for it;
 You **MUST** be Christians.

* *Pascal's Thoughts.*

† *Phil. iii. 8.*

LECTURE III.

[REVELATION NECESSARY.]

THE SADDUCEES SAY THAT THERE IS NO
RESURRECTION, NEITHER ANGEL NOR
SPIRIT: BUT THE PHARISEES CONFESS
BOTH. ACTS xxiii. 8.

THESE were two famous sects among the Jews. The Pharisees could not see any thing in the scriptures, which was not justified by the traditions of the fathers; nor the Sadducees any thing, which they could not accommodate to the principles of philosophy: These affected to be wiser than their neighbours; to be more holy and righteous than all the world. An affectation of philosophical

cal wisdom led the Sadducees to deny the resurrection of the body, and any separate state of existence of the human soul; while the more orthodox Pharisees confessed both, as doctrines congruous with the high opinion which they entertained of their own merits.

The divines, who flourished about three centuries ago, pursued the plan of the Pharisees. Their learning consisted in an acquaintance with ecclesiastical writers, and sophistical logic. They carefully collected the sentences of the Fathers, and of the Schoolmen; and, by the assistance of these, they pressed the sacred text into the service of an immoderate superstition. Our modern divines answer to the other sect: these, fond of philosophical refinements, set up reason in opposition to the categorical dictates of inspiration. To make Christianity appear more rational, they have ingeniously converted it into a sort of Deism. Whatever is found in Aristotle must first be true: if Prophets and Apostles do not speak agreeably to philosophical wis-

dom, they must be corrected by philosophical criticism, and be made to speak no more than reason can comprehend; or, no more than what reason, properly exerted, may be supposed sufficient to discover without revelation.

There are some nations who have not so much as the twilight of philosophy, those reflected rays of The Sun of Righteousness sunk beneath the moral horizon: these evidence what human nature is, when wholly left to herself, unassisted by revelation. The Jewish sects, the doctors of the middle ages of Christianity, and our modern divines, are lamentable examples, whither human reason, even with the book of revelation in her hand, would lead us, when left to her own wild, proud, presumptuous imaginations; that is, when she is not humble enough to be guided in her inquiries by the same spirit of inspiration by which revelation was at first given to mankind.

It

It will be well worth our while, to consider how very little evidence and satisfaction we can obtain in our religious inquiries, from the principles of natural religion and philosophy; in order to evince the folly and presumption of preferring, what is called, Reason, to the decisive authority of direct revelation. But, whoever would estimate the moral powers of human nature, must not sit down to calculate in his own imagination, what degrees of knowledge mankind may possibly attain, if, by any means, urged to an exertion of their powers to the utmost extent of which they are capable: he must not form his judgment, by examining, what is called, The Religion of Nature, delineated by modern infidels, who have been enlightened by that very revelation they reject as useless: he must attentively consider what human nature actually is, and what it ever hath been, when her powers have not been excited by extraordinary means, or, when destitute of supernatural aid. If thus

we consider what is, or can be, known of the nature of man, or of God, we shall find the state of the world, so dark, as to proclaim aloud the necessity of divine revelation; and shall, perhaps, be induced to adore that gracious Providence, that tender-mercy of our God; whereby the Day-spring from on high hath visited us.

There are no arguments, in favour of any opinion, more inconclusive than those, which are produced by Philosophers, for the immortality of the soul. If this assertion appear too bold, let it be recollected that Cicero, who wished to believe the immortality of the soul, and had well studied the opinions of preceding philosophers, found himself at a loss and full of uncertainty: "With all his
"proofs out of Plato, with all the argu-
"ments his vast reading and great parts could
"furnish him with for the immortality of
"the soul, he was so little satisfied, so far
"from being certain, so far from any thought
"that he had, or could prove it, that he over
"and

“and over again professes his ignorance and
“doubt of it *.”

We are so far from having any principles to prove, by natural reason, that the soul is immortal, that it never has been proved, and, I presume, therefore, never can be proved, that we have souls capable of a separate state, that is, of thinking and acting independently of the body. There are reasons, which some have thought sufficient, to prove the contrary to be probable; for experience teaches, that there are many conditions of the body in which the soul neither thinks, nor reasons, nor acts at all.

Could it be proved that the soul is not matter, or composed of subtile particles of mat-

* Locke.

Dum lego, assentior: cum posui librum, et mecum ipse de immortalitate animarum cœpi cogitare, assentio omnis illa elabitur. Dubitans, circumspectans, hæsitans, multa adversa revertens tanquam in rate in mari immenso, nostra vehitur oratio. — Cicero.

ter, it would not certainly follow that it is immortal in its own nature ; for we have not any positive idea of an immaterial being ; and, therefore, can never prove that immateriality and immortality are attributes, which must necessarily co-exist in the same subject.

To say that any creature, in heaven, or on earth, is naturally or necessarily immortal *, or is so by reason of its own nature, is to attribute to that creature a perfection

* The immortality of the soul among ancient Philosophers, was a covert way of denying a future separate state of existence. See Warburton's Divine Legation. Their notion was that the soul of man is a particle of the Divinity itself, or of the soul of the world ; and that when man dies, it returns to the soul of the world, and is absorbed, as a drop of water in the great ocean, and exists no more as the soul of man. " Making it a particle not of matter, " but of the Divine Nature itself, a little Deity in a cottage, that stays here awhile, and returns to the upper " region from whence it came : as Manilius speaks,

" An dubium est habitare Deum sub pectore nostro,

" In cœlumque redire animas, cœloque venire.

Origines Satra.

which

which belongs to God only. Let it be supposed, agreeably to the philosophy of motion, that any creature will continue, if there be nothing from without to destroy its continuance; and, suppose it far removed from every thing which can prove destructive to its being; yet still it is a creature, and, therefore, dependent on the will of the Creator *, and cannot be absolutely in an independent state: and, whether it be the will of God that it shall continue only for a time, or live for ever, cannot possibly be discovered by reason; but must be learned, if ever learned, by revelation. But we have not any know-

* Revelation teaches that the most exalted spirits depend both on the will and power of God for continuance, as the meanest reptile. *Τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκε*: In him we live, and move, and have our being: so that, were God to withdraw his support, by which creatures subsist, they would cease to be.—“That they are all ingenerable and incorruptible. Which cannot be true of the real constitutions of things—All things, that exist, besides their Author, are liable to change.”

Locke.

ledge

ledge of a creature so constituted as to be independent of other parts of creation.

If the power of thinking, and of reasoning, with which human nature is generally endowed, and the desire of life, be considered as a proof of man's immortality, it will conclude as well that beasts* have immortal souls; for they exercise the same faculties, though in a lower degree. The several spe-

* "Neither can I rely with safety on the way which
"some have taken to prove the immortality of the
"soul merely from the phænomena of sensation, which,
"they endeavor to prove, cannot be performed by mere
"matter and motion; for granting all this, yet the utmost
"that can be proved by it is no greater immortality in our
"souls than in the souls of brutes." *Origines Sacrae.*

Bp. Stillingfleet relied entirely on the arguments, which he advanced, from the operations of the mind, in correcting the errors of imagination, from the reflex acts of the mind upon itself, and the profound speculations of the mind. Such arguments may prove that the soul is not constituted of particles of gross matter; but no more prove that the soul is in itself immortal, or will exist in a separate state, than the phænomena of sensation prove it. See Mr. Locke's chapter "Of the Names of Substances."

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cies of animals which inhabit this earth are linked together, and differ but in almost imperceptible degrees: we see no greater chasm, or gap, between man and the beasts, than between man and man; for some brutes there are, which seem to have as much knowledge and reason as some that are called men. And, if, in the scale of existences, man is superior to the beasts, just as another species of animals excells those of a still inferior order, how can we be assured, by reflecting on our superior talents, that man is any thing more than a beast which will soon perish, as other beasts do? "that which be-
"falleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts,
"even one thing befalleth them: as the one
"dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all
"one breath; so that a man hath no pre-emi-
"nence above a beast; for all is vanity:"
and the probable conclusion, from considering the state of the inhabitants of this earth, is, "All go unto one place; all are of the
"dust; and all turn to dust again*."

* Eccles. iii.

It is far from my intention to deny that man has a spirit within, which will exist in a future state: my purpose is to shew the inconclusiveness of philosophical arguments, with a view to demonstrate the absurdity of neglecting the positive evidence of God's word (which is next to experience itself) to build on so uncertain a foundation as are the principles of what is called Natural Religion. The argument from the unequal distribution of rewards and punishments, does not prove the immortality of the soul: this inequality, if granted that it does exist, may perhaps excite a probable conjecture that there will be some future state; but will not prove the eternity of that state. But against the argument there stands this, in their opinion at least who reject revelation, We are not yet assured that the ways of God are unequal, with respect to his government of us in this world: the inequality may be a mere appearance, for aught we can tell, unless we were more capable of estimating the quantity of every

every man's guilt, and the inward feelings and distresses of every heart: there is reason to think that they, who endure the greatest calamities, do not always suffer the greatest pain and misery. The sufferings of innocent children cannot be urged, as a proof of the unequal distribution of rewards and punishments, by those who believe in the existence of moral evil in every child of man; and they who do not believe it, will not admit the force of the argument, unless you allow it to be an equal proof in favor of the innocent beasts, that in some future state they will be rewarded for their sufferings here; for, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." Human knowledge is circumscribed; such clouds and darkness rest on the moral and natural world; and we are so little able to account for moral and natural evil; that it is just as easy to pull down, as to build up, any opinion which is not founded on the word of God.

If the apprehension, which the heathen have expressed of divine Powers and of immortality, had been an impression on their mind by the finger of God himself, it had, no doubt, been more distinct, more uniform, and agreeable to truth: or, if it had arisen from a natural disposition for God, implanted in man in his creation, then, agreeably to that disposition, men would always have sought after God, in every age and country, and would have glorified him according to the light they had at any time obtained; which they have never done. And it is not sufficient, to account for the religion of the Gentiles, to say, Nature cries aloud through all her works, There is a God; since it is true in fact, that mankind either cannot, or will not hear that voice *. Were that voice so clear and loud

* “ They who are enlightened by revelation immediately discern the whole system of things to be no other than the workmanship of that God whom they adore. “ To them the Heavens declare his glory: the invisible things

loud as is pretended, why is it not understood by all nations? Had mankind been influenced by it, their religious practices had not been so inconsistent with, and even opposite to, the tenor of that voice; and the Literati had not so generally plunged into sceptical and atheistical speculations. And, as the vast dissimilarity, inconsistency, and absurdity, in the religions of mankind, evidence, that they never could have sprung from any innate pious disposition of the soul, and from the force of truth expressed in the works of nature; so the degree of union, or similarity, observable in them, demonstrates the same truth; for it cannot be supposed that nations the most remote from, and unconnected with each other, should ever hit on the same method of propitiating Heaven

"things of him, being first understood by revelation, are
"clearly seen. But when that light is extinct, men see
"but clouds and darkness on the face of nature, and they
"are deaf to her voice."

Pascal.

by

by the use of those sacrifices, for which there is no foundation in the nature, reason, or fitness of things. The only way left to account for religion is by recourse to revelation *. The doctrine of sacrifices, and that of the immortality of the soul, and the whole chaos of opinions, in what is termed Natural Religion, can be nothing less than the residuum of a very early and sad corruption of revelation. The nearer you approach to the times in which revelation was given to men, or to the place where it has been preserved, you find the use of sacrifice, the great object of revelation, to prevail; and, the farther you recede both from the time and place of revelation, you find moral darkness increasing, till you come to those who have not so much

* *Animos superesse corporibus*, Grotius calls, *Antiquissima Traditio a primis parentibus*: and, the general assent of nations to the existence of some Divine Being, he says, *Alia esse non potest, quam aut oraculum Dei ipsius, aut traditio, quæ a primis humani generis parentibus manavit.*

as a name for God in their language, or so much as the least notion of a sacrifice, or of immortality.

If we descend to particulars, we shall see that mankind could not possibly devise any thing more unworthy of God, more dishonorable, or insulting to him, than the religions, with which, it is pretended, they worship him. What true or tolerable notion of a Deity, says Mr. Locke, had they, who acknowledged and worshipped hundreds? Every Deity, that they owned above one, was an infallible evidence of their ignorance of God, and a proof that they had no true notion of him. To which if we add their gross conceptions of corporiety, expressed in their images, and representations of their Deities, the amours, marriages, copulations, lusts, quarrels, and other mean qualities attributed by them to their Gods; we shall have little reason to think that the heathen world, that is, the greatest part of mankind, had any knowledge of God, much less any ideas of

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him,

him, which he himself was the author of. This account of heathenism is far from being exaggerated: it is a just account of the religion of the Gentiles, comprehending those nations amongst whom civil polity, the arts and sciences, history and philosophy, were carried to a very great degree of perfection; and, amongst whom were yet retained the faint rays of traditional knowledge derived originally from revelation. And certainly our estimate of human nature ought to be taken from the condition of the far greater part of mankind.

The wisdom of the very sages of antiquity did not consist in any true knowledge of God, and of the soul; not in a discovery of truth, but in a detection of obvious error, that is, in renouncing * some of the gross

* *Neque, quid esset verum ipsum, sciebant, neque quomodo, aut ubi, aut qua mente quærendum. Ita dum succurrere humanis erroribus cupiunt, ipsi se in plagas et errores maximas induxerunt. Gladium habent, scutum non habent.*—— Lact.

opinions and superstitions of the vulgar; and in substituting refined Atheism in the place of common prejudices. Their opinions concerning God were not of a religious kind, but merely philosophical, or speculative; for they made no other use of them than to solve some difficulties they met with in accounting for the phænomena of nature. They had not any knowledge of their relation to God as the moral Governor of the world, or that they owed him any worship and service. They talked indeed of moral virtue, but their ideas of it were merely political, and had no relation to the will of God, as the principle of obedience. They had no idea of God as a pure spirit: sometimes they supposed him to be air, or fire, or a fifth element: sometimes asserted the whole world, sun, moon, and stars, and earth, and souls, and even the Deities of the superstitious vulgar, to be Gods. Their discourses of a Deity are full of absurdity, ambiguity, and self-

contradiction. They never went farther than supposing something like the electrical fluid, or other subtile matter, pervading all things, endowed with mind; and that the souls of men are parts of this matter, and therefore immortal: which idea of the soul has something in it more philosophical, perhaps; but not more agreeable to truth, than the notion of a wretched Negro, who expects to return to Africa, whenever death shall have freed him from those unfeeling, execrable *Christians*, who have made merchandise of him, and severely worked him, as a beast, under the cruel lash of a whip. So true is it, that "the world, by wisdom, "knew not God."

L E C T U R E III.

P A R T II.

WHILE ancient Greece made astonishing progress in other sciences, and in the polite arts, she made no progress in theology: not because her philosophers and poets neglected to cultivate this science; for there was not a subject they thought of, or discoursed about, more than the existence and nature of the Gods: nor was it for want of natural abilities, or of learning; for, the greatest wits, the brightest constellation of geniuses that ever illumined the republic of letters, were devoted to the investigation of the principles and causes of things. And surely this affords a strong presumption, that religious truth is not congenial with the nature of man; for, otherwise, they had made equal progress in religious knowledge as in

other sciences. But, as soon as the light of christian truth blazed abroad in the world, philosophy put on another appearance : by the assistance of this borrowed light, later philosophers spoke, and wrote, more worthily of God than their more famous predecessors. It is this light, which has enabled the Deists* of the last, and of the present, century to surpass the ancients, whom they affect to admire as the models of perfection. And, there never was a man, whose conceptions of the Deity were worthy of him, or, whose expressions concerning God rose at all to the dignity and majesty of the divine perfections, who has not been enlightened by revelation. Even the fertile genius of Milton was indebt-

* Who have stolen fire from Heaven, and confidently deny the theft.

As philosophy improved by revelation, Christianity, in her turn, was corrupted by philosophy. *Ex philosophorum ingeniis omnes hæreses animantur*, said one, whose beclouded mind had light enough to see this source of error.

Tertul.

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ed to revelation: his majesty of thought, and splendor of expression, and all that is found in his writings worthy of God, are derived from this source.

As for the resurrection of the body, it is a subject, which, confessedly, has never once entered the thinking mind of man to conceive it possible. Ancient philosophers denied the possibility of it: St. Paul was mocked at Athens, as a vain babbler, because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. And it seems more than probable, that mankind would never have any apprehension of the soul, or of its immortality, if born and educated absolutely in a state of nature; and would be as much without religion and * ar-

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tificial

* "I doubt not, but if a colony of young children
"should be placed in an island where no fire was, they would
"certainly neither have any notion of such a thing, nor
"name for it — and perhaps too their apprehensions
"would be as far removed from any name or notion of
"a God, till some one amongst them had employed his
"thoughts to inquire into the constitution and causes of
"things

tificial language as any of the four-legged animals which howl in the vast deserts. There never has been discovered a single instance of a nation, or of one individual in any nation, where every trace of revelation had been once lost, or where revelation had been totally corrupted, that ever emerged out of darkness, or that ever recovered one idea worthy of God, or of the soul. But that, which strikes me more than any other evidence of the moral darkness with which human nature is enveloped, is the astonishing indisposition of men to credit revelation, even where it is professed to be believed, notwithstanding the allowed importance of it, and notwithstanding the prodigious degree of evidence by which it is authenticated. Millions in Christendom pretend to believe in God,

“things, which would easily lead him to the notion of a
“God.” Locke on Innate Ideas. Mr. Locke should have told us how many ages this colony might subsist before any one would so happily employ his thoughts: perhaps the world would be at an end first.

and

and in a future state, while matter of fact every day proclaims their infidelity: for, when men shew no serious regard for religion in their lives, we must conclude that custom and interest have inclined them to profess opinions they never were convinced of, or profelytes to. And if God be so little known and regarded by men, if there be so little real attention to a future state, even where the revelation of God and futurity is declared; can we imagine, that mankind, engaged by a great degree of necessity, and by sensual instinct and inclination, to earthly things, would ever have thought of God, inquired after him, or have concluded that there is an hereafter, or formed any scheme of religion, much less such an unaccountable one as that of sacrificing beasts to the Deity, and offering up a first-born for the sin of the soul; unless there had been just such a revelation as we actually find there hath been, and unless that revelation had been corrupted?

There

There cannot be a stronger presumptive argument, to convince you of the moral darkness of human nature, and of the improbability that man, of himself, would ever recover one idea worthy of God, or one thought of heaven, than the disposition, which men have ever shewed, to corrupt revealed religion; to depart from truth into error; to go from good to bad; and from bad to worse; even till they have lost the very name of God, and buried every thought of their eternal concerns in the most extravagant solicitude about present objects. Revelation was no sooner given to men than they began to pervert it. Even "when they knew God, " they glorified him not as God, neither were " thankful" for the ordinary bounties of Providence, or the extraordinary benefit of revelation: they chose rather to follow the wild imaginations of reason, than submit to the decisive authority and determinations of God's word. The consequence of which was, " Their foolish heart was darkened;"

and,

and, at length, so darkened, that they
“changed the glory of the incorruptible
“God into an image made like to corruptible
“man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts,
“and creeping things.” In consequence of
this departure from God, they sunk into vice;
for God, in just judgment, “gave them up
to vile affections;” from which wretched
state of error no one of the human race hath
ever recovered himself. Revelation has been
repeatedly renewed, at sundry times, and in
diverse manners, to particular families, tribes,
and nations; and has been repeatedly cor-
rupted in a very short space of time. Chris-
tianity fared the fate of former dispensations;
and, is now so generally corrupted, that it
is much more easy to say what genuine Chris-
tianity is not, than what it is. This dispo-
sition, in human nature, to darken counsel
by words without knowledge; this propen-
sity to forget God, which has appeared in
every age of the world, and under every dis-
pensation of revealed religion, amounts to
this,

this, "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge;" for these appearances cannot be accounted for, but on the supposition of some malevolent, atheistical principle in the nature of man; or, which amounts to the same thing, to the entire ascendancy of sensual instinct. The experience of ages teaches that it is the nature of water to precipitate down a declining plane, and flow towards the deep abyss; and, we may as well presume, in opposition to this experience, that the waters of stagnant pools and lakes may of themselves begin to move, to ascend, and flow upwards, till they have reached the summit of the Alps or Andes; as to imagine that man of himself, who, in all ages, hath constantly corrupted revelation, and departed from God, and bounded all his prospects within the narrow circle of earth, will ever enquire after, and find out the Almighty, or discover and improve his own eternal interests.

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There is not then the least foundation in truth, for that palliating excuse for Idolatry, that man discovers by it a sincere regard for God, at the same time that he exposes the infirmity of his own nature, by the foolish and monstrous ceremonies, with which he means to reverence the Divinity. The idea, I confess, is plausible, philosophical, conciliating: but, the evidence of facts obliges me to insist, that the real cause of Idolatry and superstition, the real ground of all the brutish ignorance and vices of mankind, is an intrinsic depravity of heart. If God hath ever been revealed, or by any means made known to men, they could not so generally have been involved in error, have dishonoured their Maker, and degraded themselves, had it not been for an evil principle universally prevalent: and, did not men really love darkness rather than light, it would not be so difficult, as it ever hath been found, to reclaim mankind. A readiness to palliate, to excuse, and even to justify error, is
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one instance of this depravity: but it may appear at last, beyond a possibility of doubt, by the general behavior and actions of nations, in every time, in every state, and under every dispensation of Providence, whatever advantages and privileges, corrections and distresses God sent them, and by an induction of particulars to the conscience of individuals --- it may appear, I say, when, alas! there will be no remedy, that the heart, the very nature of man, was set against God. How prodigiously great will human depravity and guilt then appear, when the mystery of Providence, and the mystery of iniquity, shall be laid open! The whole process of things, from the beginning to the end of time, millions and millions of facts, will evidence that man is a sinner; and every one will then be conscious of sin, though it may be the first time he ever thought seriously of God, or reflected on himself. The miserable inhabitant of Terra del Fuego, or de Labrador, may then see, that, in what-
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ever circumstances he might have been placed other than those in which he lived, he had been the same, as to his moral character; or, with this only difference, that his guilt had greatly exceeded, if his talents had been greater.

And if, in our present state, we ever attain so much light as to discern the existence of moral evil, we shall find ourselves involved in tenfold night; because we cannot, by any principles of reason, discover an adequate remedy, or create one ray of hope. We have a moral sense, or conscience, as soon as we discover the existence of moral evil, that it deserves punishment. And, if sin be to be punished at all, why not all sin? Why not sin in the nature, in the youngest, as well as actual transgression in the oldest? And why not for ever? We do not see any one redeemed from suffering; not one restored to such a state of favor with God, wherein evil is done away. And what ground have we to imagine that this will ever be? Hath any
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one ever made agreement with God for his brother? Hath any one ever been able to save himself from death, or to recover himself from the grave? Can any thing we do, any solemn rites, extend to God, to oblige him? Can we discern any thing in thousands of rams offered in sacrifice, or in the blood of bulls and goats, which shall be a reason with a holy God to act contrary to our real demerit, that is, to pardon the sinner, so that, in the view of it, the conscience shall be absolved from guilt? Can any partial obedience to any known law be more than, or even so much as, we owe to God, that it should compensate for sin? Can we expel the principles of moral evil from our nature, and cease to be transgressors? Repentance may be a proper acknowledgment of guilt; but is no atonement, no proper satisfaction. If we were to shed rivers of tears in remembrance of our folly and presumption, it may still be necessary for the righteous governor of the world to condemn and punish the guilty.

guilty. But what is sin? It is the creature's alienation from the Creator: a sinner stands in opposition to the will of Heaven: he is one whose conduct hath denied the existence of any such Being as God is: the scriptures call it enmity against God. And do we not find ourselves already in a state of suffering? And is not a state of suffering, a manifestation of God's righteous vengeance? Death may be the appointed wages of sin; and, for aught we can tell, may be a crisis, in which a perfect state of misery will commence. And, if man be to suffer in eternity, his punishment must be eternal; for that mode of existence will not allow the idea of time in which pain may cease to be.

Superficial reasoners, who are ready to take every thing for granted which suits their wishes, will answer all this, by exclaiming, The Supreme Being is good and merciful: But, it should be considered, that he is a perfectly holy and righteous governor of the world; or, no governor at all: the conse-

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quences are too serious and important to us to allow of any presumption: we should know, and be sure of the ground we stand upon. But here, in this most interesting concern, natural religion fails us: reason and philosophy can never discover that there is any such attribute of God as that, which we call Mercy, by which a full forgiveness can be extended to a sinner consistently with the divine perfections. The instances of beneficence discernible in the constitution of the world, and the instances of forbearance, which we may observe in the course of God's providential dispensations, are no proofs of this mercy sufficient to relieve a wounded spirit: and surely there is some reason to doubt, if not to despair, of mercy, when we consider that misery is ever attendant on vice, and that the mitigation of sufferings, which offenders sometimes enjoy, is but a short, imperfect reprieve; for, the most dreaded of all evils we know in this world certainly overtakes them sooner or later, and concludes

concludes the present scene of human wretchedness. But, even on the supposition of mercy, we have no ground to be assured that it ever will be extended to us; because that all men should be exempted from punishment may be utterly repugnant to the universal system, and that constitution of things, which infinite wisdom hath thought proper to adopt; and because mercy, in its very nature is sovereign, it being right and fit for God, in the view of all his sinful creatures, to say, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion:" so that a guilty creature can have no hope, but by a divine manifestation of a Redeemer, or of some medium suitable to the exigencies of his case, and by a revelation of the sovereign and gracious will of God, that he shall be restored to favor, revive, and live for ever.

That there are some Atheists, and many Sceptics, and that a great many men of letters are sceptically inclined, is to me no cause

of wonder. The absurd attempt to make Christianity appear like a more perfect kind of Deism, has occasioned a vast increase of Deists, in every Christian country, since the revival of letters: and, when men have lost sight of the importance of Christianity, and have once begun to suspect the truth of revealed religion, they have no firm footing left, but must begin to doubt of every thing; because the principles of reason and philosophy, or of, what is called, Natural Religion, cannot afford any solid satisfaction either concerning our own nature, or that of God, of our present, or future state of existence.

If it can be proved that there is no occasion for any revelation, and, consequently, that there never hath been a revelation given to mankind; if it can be proved that the scriptures do not contain a revelation; if the evidences which authenticate the bible do not even exceed those by which we credit any other history; or, if the doctrines of

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the gospel are such that they cannot be true, then let Christianity be hooted out of the world: but if the evidences of revealed religion are sufficient to persuade an unprejudiced mind; if the scriptures contain a true history of human nature; a revelation worthy of God; if they exhibit the only sufficient remedy for guilt and moral depravity; if they contain a sure foundation for the hope of eternal life; let us not be so absurd to adulterate this living stream of divine truth by philosophy and deism; let us not prefer the faint light of the glow-worm, merely because it shines in the night, to the light of day; or, the broken cistern, which can hold no water, to the perennial spring. Let us turn our grateful adoring eyes, to that quarter of the heavens from which all the lights, which ever illumined our dark world, have proceeded; and with reverence search those sacred books, which contain a history of all the revelations which God has ever given to mankind. And, however humiliating it

be to the pride we feel in a consciousness of those distinguishing talents derived from a liberal education, it must be remembered, that there is a temper of heart, very unlike this pride, which is more necessary to the understanding of God's word, than philosophy, logic, or philology, or the most perfect acquaintance with all the learned languages. With this temper, a mechanic or plowman will sooner discern the mind and will of God, than the eagle-eye of a Voltaire, or the penetrating genius of a Gibbon, and even than the critical skill of a Warburton, if destitute of this temper. "I thank thee, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the "wise and prudent, and hast revealed them "unto babes."

LECTURE IV.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

INTRODUCTION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the general apostacy of Christians from the faith and hope of the gospel, there yet remain not a few, though few in comparison with the vast multitude of empty professors of this holy religion, who are sincere disciples of Jesus Christ. There are some amongst the clergy, both in Protestant and Catholic countries, who entertain liberal sentiments, and despise priestcraft as much as any infidel can do. They can well distinguish between the character of a mere national priest, and that of a Chris-

tian minister. While they support the former character, and preserve it from utter contempt, by a consistent conduct, and a decent attention to established forms and ceremonies; their hearts, wholly attached to Jesus, glow with the idea of being his servants; and, a wish to make men real Christians prompts them, more than all other motives, to the service of mankind. Whatever zeal they may express for the national establishment of external Christianity, is not the fruit of bigotry, nor doth it spring from a regard to their own private secular interests; but from loyalty to their Master, and from charity to men, on account of the great advantage such an establishment affords them, to profess and teach the doctrines of genuine Christianity. Such a clergyman as I would here describe is the rector of my parish; by whose permission, I am about to read to you a discourse lately delivered by him from the pulpit in my hearing. I present it to you as an example of simplicity in preaching

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ing Christian truths, and as a contrast to that method which has obtained, to the extinction almost of the Christian spirit, by adulterating God's word with philosophic principles and logic. I never find this clergyman attempting to establish preconceived opinions, by abstract reasoning or abstruse argumentation; and then hinting, that the Bible countenances his doctrine, by a slight allusion to the language of scripture: he never attempts to shew his ingenuity, or learning, in accommodating some obscure text to his purpose, by demonstrating what the text *may* signify: but, relying on the authority of divine revelation, his method is, to exhibit the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, by an appeal to such passages of scripture as are perspicuous, and which want no critical skill to express their meaning. The subject of the sermon before me is, The Ascension. It is not the fact he wishes to establish, so much as its importance to us. To this end, he brings the scripture fully into the view of his audience, and takes it in that sense

sense which would be obvious to a peasant, who had never heard any thing of the different opinions of critics and commentators. But, lest the meaning of a single passage, taken from the context, should be doubted; he brings several passages of scripture expressing the same truth in a different manner, yet equally convincing by themselves; that by the united force of all together, it may appear he hath not suborned a false witness to pervert the truth. He then illustrates his doctrine, and concludes with a suitable exhortation grounded upon it.

AND WHEN HE HAD SPOKEN THESE WORDS, WHILE THEY BEHELD, HE WAS TAKEN UP, AND A CLOUD RECEIVED HIM OUT OF THEIR SIGHT. ACTS i. 9.

WHEN our Saviour's sufferings were ended, and he was risen from the dead, he continued forty days on earth; in which
time

time he was frequently seen by his Apostles, who received many infallible proofs of the reality of his resurrection. And when they were assembled together, on mount Olivet, he commanded them to remain at Jerusalem; and promised that, in a few days, they should be baptised with the Holy Ghost, to inform them better of the nature of the new dispensation of Providence which was then about to commence, and to qualify them with extraordinary powers, to preach the gospel to the Jews, and to all the world. And then, immediately in their presence, while they beheld him as plainly as they had ever seen him with their eyes, he was taken up; and they saw the King of glory ascending toward the heavens, till a cloud received him out of their sight.

The fact was so clear and evident to the senses of these many and faithful witnesses, that they had no just ground to doubt the truth of it: They had likewise the testimony of two angels, who stood by the Apostles, while
they

they steadfastly looked towards heaven, as he went up; who said, that the same Jesus, who was then exalted, would certainly return in as manifest and glorious a manner, at the end of the world, as he had been seen to go into heaven. But the consequent effects of his exaltation are, to us, more certain evidences of it. The ascension of Christ had been represented under the law, by the high-priest, entering once every year into the Holy of Holies; which was a part of the tabernacle, and of the temple, designed to represent heaven. It was foretold by the prophet David, in the sixty-eighth psalm; "Thou
" hast ascended up on high, thou hast led
" captivity captive, and received gifts for
" men:" And, our Saviour had told his disciples of it repeatedly, and promised, as an evidence of his exaltation, that he would send down the Holy Ghost upon them in a sensible manner. Agreeably to the tenor of these, and other, prophecies, and to this promise of our Saviour, the Holy Ghost was given on

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the day of Pentecost. The ignorant, the unlearned, the prejudiced, and cowardly disciples were then immediately qualified to preach the gospel in the face of the most violent opposition; and were enabled to confirm their testimony by many wonderful works, which without the immediate interposition of divine power, could not possibly be effected. Conviction was forced into the hearts of thousands of the Jews, who had hitherto remained obstinate; and a great part of the heathen world was profelyted to the worship of the true God and Saviour, by these men; who were destitute of human aid and natural abilities equal to so great a work; and whose own peculiar circumstances, their prejudices especially, altogether opposed the very undertaking of it. We have, therefore, more than historical evidence of the ascension of Jesus; for the establishment of Christianity in heathen nations is a certain proof of it: and, all sincere Christians, who pray in the name of Jesus, and receive answers to their pray-

prayers, are assured thereby, that the Lord is indeed ascended up on high; since the God of truth would never answer their prayers, to confirm them in the belief of such a falsehood, if it were one.

That we may fully understand the doctrine of Christ's ascension, we must consider how the scripture connects his ascension with his humiliation, and the occasion and design of both.

Our Lord, discoursing with Nicodemus, thus expressed the one with the other; "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man, who is in heaven." St. Paul wrote thus to the Ephesians; "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens." Christ prayed for his glorification in reference to, and on the ground of, his humiliation: "I have glorified thee *on the earth*; I have
" finished

“ finished the work thou gavest me to do.
“ And now, O Father, glorify thou me with
“ thine ownself, with the glory which I had
“ with thee before the world was.” We
learn, by these scriptures, that our Saviour
had a being before any creature existed; that,
in eternity, he was with the Father, and had
glory in common with the Father; that, in
time, he emptied himself of his divine glory;
and, in a way of most astonishing humilia-
tion, came into this world, and glorified
God upon earth; and, having done this, he
claimed the resumption of his divine glory
in heaven. All this is very explicitly declar-
ed by St. Paul, in terms which can hardly
be mistaken; and, which cannot be perverted,
by those who wish to pervert them, without
the utmost violence of criticism to wrest the
plain and obvious meaning of words. Ex-
horting the Philippians to humility and cha-
rity, this astonishing instance of the gracious
condescension of Christ Jesus is proposed as
an example, “ who, being in the form of
“ God

“ God* thought it not robbery to be equal
 “ with God; but made himself of no repu-
 “ tation, and took upon him the form of a
 “ servant, and was made in the likeness of
 “ men; and, being found in fashion as a
 “ man, he humbled himself, and became
 “ obedient unto death, even the death of
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* It is to be noticed that this humility of Christ Jesus was
 previous to his taking upon him the form of a servant, and
 to his being made in the likeness of men; which must have
 been previous to his birth; for in that form and likeness
 he appeared all his days on earth: and truly, if he had
 no existence before he was found in fashion as one of the
 human species, and was never any thing more than a mere
 creature, there would not be any emphatical expression of
 humility in his example. For a mere creature not to affect
 equality with God, is no greater humility than consisted
 with the pride of Alexander; who, though he affected di-
 vinity, as the son of Jupiter Ammon, never dreamt of be-
 ing equal to the Father of Gods and men: and the Apostle
 might as well have said, Let this mind be in you which was
 also in Alexander the Great; who though he conquered the
 world, and, as a God, had the disposal of the fortunes of
 kings and nations, and was complimented with divine ho-
 nours; yet never affected equality with the Supreme Being,

“ the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

nor once dreamt of the blasphemous robbery that posterity would be guilty of, in giving to him the worship which is due to God alone. This is much like the gloss which some have put upon the text, to obscure its meaning. But they would offer no greater insult to our understandings, were they to endeavour to prove that there is no such thing as motion, or matter, or that the world is only an idea, or that there is no such book as the bible, than they now offer by their confident assertions that there is no such doctrine in the bible as this, that Jesus is the Son of God, in such a sense as to be equal with God. I cannot forbear mentioning here another parallel text: “ We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet, for your sakes, became poor.” This is not a true historical fact, if Christ Jesus had no existence previous to his incarnation, or birth; for he never was rich while he lived here, nor became poor at any time; for he always was so.

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We have now to consider the occasion and design of this humiliation and exaltation of Jesus.

When man had sinned against God, he was turned out of Paradise, and became the heir and inhabitant of a world of woe and misery. He could not possibly discover any hope of recovering his former blest estate, or devise any sufficient means, by which he might obtain that better Paradise in Heaven, for the wages of sin are death and hell; and the truth and justice of God, agreeably to the constitution which infinite wisdom had thought fit to establish, required, that man should suffer the due reward of sin, as the only way in which sinful man could glorify the moral government of God.

But the Son of God bowed the heavens, and came down; "was made flesh and dwelt among us; was made under the law;" and "was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." By this act of perfect submission to God
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and charity to men, he glorified God *on earth*, where he had been dishonored by man, whose sin was the denial of such a Being as God is, and had darkened the divine perfections; i. e. a medium was established, by which the divine perfections might appear, and shine forth gloriously in eternal favor towards men. As soon as this was accomplished, the grave was opened; and a way into the holiest was made manifest. Jesus rose, and ascended up on high; took possession of heaven for men, and was invested with all power in heaven and earth, to exercise it for the redeemed, and to bestow on human kind whatever is necessary to our eternal well-being. He therefore "gave gifts unto men, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The holy scriptures express this salvation, by representing all believers quickened to-

gether with Christ; risen with him; ascended, and now sitting with him in heaven. In Heb. I chap. we are told, that he, who was the brightness of glory, and the express image of the Father's person, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power, purged our sins by himself, and then sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. St. Paul shews the glorious effect of this session, as it relates to us: he begins his epistle to the Ephesians with this thankful doxology; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" and, in the second chapter, "God who is rich in mercy hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ."

In the eighth Psalm, man is represented as lord of the world, and having dominion over all things in it, so that there is not any thing which is not put in subjection under him.

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The apostle observes (Heb. 2.) that this description of man's glory and honor, as set over the whole creation, is not at all suitable to the present frail and suffering state of human nature. But, what then? We see Jesus, adds the apostle, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and worship; we see him exalted to the head of creation; we see him lord of all: and this is our triumph; "for both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren;" they are one with him; joint heirs with Christ Jesus; and in that he lives and reigns (it is the same thing to them) they live and reign with him. Our hope, therefore, enters into that within the veil: we look upon heaven as sure to us; as our own certain inheritance; because Christ is entered into heaven for us; and hath taken possession of it; and all things are put under his feet, to exercise dominion on our behalf,

and to make all things work together for our good.

“ In his death I see the price,
 “ And, in his great ascent, the proof supreme
 “ Of immortality.

“ Man’s nature then
 “ Took wing, and mounted with him from the
 “ tomb !

“ Then, then I rose ; then, first humanity
 “ Triumphant, pass’d the crystal ports of light,
 “ (Stupendous guest !) and seiz’d eternal youth,
 “ Seized in our name.

“ Man’s mortality
 “ Was then transferr’d to death, and Heaven’s du-
 “ ration

“ Unalienably seal’d to this frail frame,
 “ This child of dust---Man, all-immortal, hail !”

YOUNG’S Night Thoughts.

The following illustration is intended to make the doctrine of Christ’s ascension, in relation to its importance to us, as plain as possible to the meanest capacity. Suppose that you, or one of your forefathers, had been guilty of some high crime, or misde-
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meanor, and had forfeited all the honors, privileges, and estates, which you, or your forefathers, once possessed; and, that you were, in consequence, reduced to a state of abject poverty, and banished forever from your country. But some mighty and rich person, touched with compassion at the sight of your wretched condition, by a wonderful act of charity, has regained your freedom, your privileges, estates, and dignities; is gone before you in your name, has taken actual possession of your estates for you; has obtained and secured to you every thing necessary to bring you back to your country; and is engaged to put you, after a while, into the real, actual, and full possession of all that you esteem valuable and dear. Though you are still living in the country of your banishment, you think upon the estates as your own, because you have taken possession of them already by your proxy, or representative. Your poverty indeed is so extreme, that you have not suffi-

cient to bear your expences on your journey home; and the obstacles and dangers to be surmounted are so many and great, that all your friend has done, to purchase and take possession of your estates, is likely to be in vain; therefore your great restorer remits and sends to you, from time to time, as necessity requires, certain portions of your estates, and such necessary guides and guards as will enable you to return safe from your banishment. These remittances and aids you look upon as certain earnest, that the estates are now your own; and, are pledges of your benefactor's care and fidelity.

Apply this representation to what you have heard of our redemption by Christ. We are in this world in a state of banishment, exposed to sin. Christ has obtained our forfeited life, and the heavenly inheritance. In our nature, and in our name, he is gone to heaven, and has taken possession of it for us; and now he sends the supplies of his spirit and grace, to bring us into that goodly inheritance.

tance. These supplies are an earnest, and sure pledge to us, from our heavenly Father, of his good-will towards us, and of our right, or title, to the full enjoyment of eternal life; and, that we shall not fail in our expectation of it, though the obstacles, difficulties, and dangers in the way to it, are exceedingly many and great, and, otherwise, unsurmountable. How important, then! and, of what infinite consequence to us, is the ascension of Christ! How plain are those words, which he spake to his disciples; "It is expedient for you that I go away." And how interesting that message, which he sent unto them, after his resurrection! "Tell my bretheren that I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God."

I shall now mention one practical inference; which is, the great duty of heavenly-mindedness. "If ye then, said the Apostle to the Colossians, be risen with Christ,
" seek

“ seek those things which are above, where
“ Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.
“ Set your affections on things above, not
“ on things on the earth. For ye are dead,
“ and your life is hid with Christ in God.
“ When Christ, who is our life, shall ap-
“ pear, then shall ye also appear with him
“ in glory. Mortify therefore your mem-
“ bers which are upon the earth; fornication,
“ uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil
“ concupiscence, and covetousness, which
“ is idolatry.” If you were in a state of
banishment, and suffering miserably in a foreign country, and were redeemed from it, and to return again to the enjoyment of the greatest honors, privileges, and estates in your own country, how unsuitable would it be to engage all your thoughts in concerns of that country wherein you are strangers? How would you think of home! how diligent, to provide for your return! and to make the best of your way thither!

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"Where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also."

If we were without this precious hope, in Christ; if this world were our all; then the Epicurean doctrine would be the wisest; Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. But, whereas humanity hath found a way to heaven; whereas we are called to the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus; let us deny ourselves, and mortify all those tempers and lusts which would render us unfit for heaven; let us beware even of those necessary cares, and innocent pleasures, which, through our depravity, are too apt to take us off from better things, and draw us aside from the path of holiness. We are to consider ourselves as strangers and pilgrims on earth; to regard every thing in it as less than nothing and vanity, compared with our glorious hope; and even to consider this world as polluted, and devoted to destruction. The momentary sufferings of this present life may well
be

be lightly regarded, by those who are looking into that heaven of everlasting peace and joy as their own certain, inalienable portion. I reckon, said the apostle, that they are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us. And, on the same principle, the honors, riches, and pleasures of the present life are, with good reason, slighted by sincere disciples. I say with good reason: for the principle is very different from that on which many morose and proud moralists, and many gloomy and self-sufficient religionists, detach themselves from the busy and gay world; who only affect to be wiser than their frail neighbours, and make a merit of their mortifications. But can we consistently agitate our spirits with worldly politics, and scramble, and fight, for this perishing world, as they do, who have no such hope? when our citizenship is in heaven; and, while we look not at the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal;

temporal; but at the things which are not seen, and which are eternal.

If such is the principle, and the spirit of Christianity, how little Christianity is to be found in the world! Do not your hearts condemn any of you? I feel a reluctance to reprove—but, can the lewd, the drunkard, the profane swearer; can the worldly-minded, those who are devoted to gain, to pleasure and dissipation, ever imagine, that they believe in the Saviour sitting at the right hand of power? Can they fancy that they have any true faith, or hope, in Christ; when they never walk, as he walked, or purify themselves, as he is pure? If they entertain any such imagination, how astonishing! and, how fatal is their delusion!

The Collects, for Ascension-day, and the Sunday after, will be a proper conclusion of this discourse.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended
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into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

O God, the King of Glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven: we beseech thee, leave us not comfortless, but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

LECTURE V.

THE CREDIBILITY OF REVEALED
RELIGION.

BE NOT CHILDREN IN UNDERSTAND-
ING; BUT IN UNDERSTANDING BE
MEN. I COR. XIV. XX.

IT is not easy to say, whether the presumption of setting up reason against revelation, or, the folly of setting revelation against reason, be the greatest instance of human error; for, without reason, revelation cannot be received; and, without revelation, reason is unable to guide us in the most important concerns.

Reflection, reason and revelation*, cannot afford us any light without experience,
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*By *revelation* here is meant traditional revelation; for immediate, or original, revelation may be as much a source
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or, beyond the proportion of it; for it is as impossible for man, as for a tree, to form any judgment of things, before the mind is furnished with corresponding ideas; and, though experience often fails us, for want of a sufficient stock of it, in judging things which are immediately before us; yet, is it the ground of faith in the sublimest mysteries of revealed religion.

The articles of pure revelation are such as lie beyond the reach of our natural faculties, or above reason; yet never contradict the evidence of our senses, or that certain knowledge we derive from experience; and, there is not a single article, which experience, or reason grounded on it, will not,

of new ideas, as sensation itself. We cannot set any bounds to the power of God, who may, supernaturally, imprint what ideas he pleases on the mind of any man: but these can never be the subject of traditional revelation to be communicated to others. And therefore St. Paul speaks of what he heard, when he was taken up into the third heaven, as not lawful, i. e. not possible, for a man to utter.

See Mr. Locke's Chap. *Of Faith and Reason*.

in a greater or less degree, evidence to be credible. There is such a wonderful analogy in the works of God, that I fear not to discover a coincidence, or agreement, in the book of revelation with the book of nature; and expect to find myself as much a rational creature in the church, as in the schools of philosophy.

To shew how all our knowledge depends on experience, and is limited to the proportion of our ideas derived from sensation; suppose a man created with faculties as perfect as were those of Aristotle, Sir Isaac Newton, or Mr. Locke; and, that he found himself placed in the drawing-room at St. James's; he could not, by reason alone, have any apprehension of it being possible for him ever to get out of the apartment: He could not immediately judge of the distances of things; and, if by chance he were to lift his hand to his head, he might imagine, from this little experience, that he could as easily touch the cieling, or reach the distant sky,

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until further experience had taught him his mistake.

The knowledge we have of what is good for food, and of the means of procuring it, is obtained by us from experience. But, it is not easy to conceive, how a man, when first created, much less, how multitudes created together, and placed in this world, should be able to subsist, * if not instructed by a revelation from some superior Power; and, it is as difficult to imagine, how man, at first, could receive that instruction; because we find it necessary to gain a stock of simple ideas

* This difficulty of subsisting, even in a fertile country, is well described in that much-admired book, *The History of Robinson Crusoe*. The author was obliged to warp the wrecked vessel within reach of his hero, and to land a rich cargo of utensils on the island, and, after all, to describe innumerable difficulties, that the preservation of a man from starving, who had a good share of natural ingenuity and a large stock of ideas from experience, might appear a probable event. We little think what needy, helpless, dependent creatures we are; and how much we are indebted to the united skill and labour of thousands for our daily enjoyment.

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from experience, before we are capable of receiving any instruction at all. It is indeed agreeable to our notions of the Almighty power and goodness of God to suppose, that when he created man, he impressed his mind, by a supernatural influence, with such ideas as enabled him to receive instruction, or gave him at once such a knowledge of the creatures to which he had any relation, as was sufficient to his well-being.

If a repeating watch were presented to a savage, it would not be easy to make him comprehend the nature and use of it; and, without information, it would not be possible for him even to guess what it might be. His experience would fail him, because he has not a sufficient stock of experience to lead him to any understanding about it; and, should he presume to judge of it on the experience which he has obtained in the uncultivated wilds and rude societies of men ignorant as himself, he would probably conclude, that the watch is a living animal endowed with a

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faculty of speaking, or uttering its own peculiar voice; and, were the watch to go down while in his possession, he would imagine that the animal had died for want of food, or through fear of savage treatment. Thus there are many things knowable, which we can never come to the knowledge of; because we are placed in circumstances, which will not allow us any opportunity to furnish ourselves with those ideas, which are necessary to illuminate our understandings: And, through the narrowness of our experience, we often want skill to use the ideas we have, that is, to examine, perceive, or determine their agreement or disagreement; which occasions much wrong judgment of things, and is indeed a source of almost infinite error. But this should not quench our thirst after knowledge, or stop our inquiries after truth: Experience is yet a sure foundation for much useful and entertaining knowledge. By attending to experiment, agreeably to the advice of Bacon, the father

of later philosophers, great progress has been made in physical knowledge; and, if we proceed with the same degree of caution in search of moral truth, as we have done in our inquiries after natural truth, that is, if we be content to go no further than certain experience will lead us, and be careful to proceed to its utmost extent, I will venture to predict, scepticism and infidelity will be banished from the republic of letters; we shall discern the credibility of revealed religion, and embrace the gospel of our Saviour; and, by the assistance of this medium, shall penetrate further, and with greater certainty, into the intellectual system, than any Newtonian philosopher ever did by the use of telescopes into the regions of space.

We cannot immediately discover the events of ages past; yet, experience leads to what is called traditional, or historic, knowledge. Experience teaches that such and such things may have been, because similar things are now; and, that persons in certain circum-

stances may be credited in what they relate to us; and from hence we gain an idea of former existences, and are assured that in ages past many things were, as they are represented to us. But, if any one pretend to say what shall happen in future ages of the world, we give little, or no credit to him; because experience assures us all men are so nearly constituted alike, that no man is able to look further into futurity than ourselves, so as to determine that such and such things, with a number of accidental circumstances, shall certainly happen in any particular period of time: and we give the less credit to such prognosticators, if we have already experienced much disappointment by listening to bold pretenders to extraordinary science. But, should any man, not pretending to any extraordinary ability in himself, declare that foreknowledge of future events has been immediately communicated to him by God; and, if it be agreeable to our notions of the Deity that he is omniscient, and that his
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goodness may, for certain important ends to be answered by it, vouchsafe to communicate such a prescience, we then conceive that the person pretending to predict what shall be hereafter may be a true prophet; and we have only to consider, whether there be sufficient evidence to persuade us that he is not deceived himself, nor intends to impose on our credulity, and whether we understand the meaning of his declarations. If the prophet perform any works, which we know by experience to be above all human power, and contrary to the established laws of nature, and which, therefore, cannot be performed without the interposition of that God who established those laws; or, if we have already experienced a completion of a great part of the prophecies in question; we then assent to his propositions on the ground of this our own experience, and attain, what may be called, prophetic knowledge, or that faith which gives a subsistence, in the

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mind, to things hoped for, and is the evidence of things not seen.

If there be not any thing in the nature of God, or in the world above, similar to what we are conscious of in ourselves, or experience in this world, we cannot possibly obtain any positive knowledge of him, or of the world of spirits; unless God were to impart some new faculty to us, or to impress our minds with ideas which cannot be acquired by sensation. A great part of the knowledge we derive from revelation is of the negative kind; such as creation, self-existence, eternity, immensity, infinity, immateriality, and perfection; of which we cannot, in our present state, have any adequate ideas. Experience teaches us, that one thing may be formed out of another, with almost endless variety: thus trees may become chips, boards, and tables. But we have no experience of the producing of any thing, the matter of which did not exist before in another form; and, therefore, it is not possible to have any

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idea of creation. If it be contrary to our experience of the nature of matter to suppose, that the world could make itself, because that which is not, cannot begin to act, and because matter in itself is inert, and cannot begin to move, the same reason must conclude, if it conclude agreeably to experience, that the world did always exist, or, that the matter of which it is formed was from all eternity. It is on the credit of revelation, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God out of things which do not appear, or out of nothing. But this revelation, which sublimely describes the Almighty *Fiat* of Jehovah speaking worlds into existence, does not communicate any new primitive idea, or give us any knowledge of creation, what it is. We obtain no more than a negative knowledge, to wit, that there is a way in which things exist, or come into existence, different from any thing of which we have any experience.

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It is by experience we come to a knowledge of the wonderful chains of beings from the senseless clod to the brightest genius of human kind. And it is agreeable to this experience, or knowledge derived from it, to suppose it possible, and even probable, that the chain of beings extends upward, even to God himself. Hence the doctrine of spirits is agreeable to experience, and, therefore, worthy of credit. We see a vast diversity in the nature of all things with which we have any great acquaintance; it is therefore agreeable to our experience to suppose, there may be beings whose mode of existence is wholly different from our own. "He that will not set himself proudly at the top of all things," says Mr. Locke, "but will consider the immensity of this fabric, and the great variety that is to be found in this little and inconsiderable part of it, which he has to do with, may be apt to think, that in other mansions of it, there may be other, and different intelligent beings, of whose faculties

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"ties he has as little knowledge or apprehension, as a worm shut up in one drawer of a cabinet, hath of the senses or understanding of a man; such variety and excellency being suitable to the wisdom and power of the Maker." If it should be asserted, that any Being, whose nature is the same as our own, does actually exist in ten thousand places at once, as is asserted of the corporal presence of Christ, our experience contradicts it, and we justly conclude it impossible; and, if it be pretended that revelation assures us of it, we conclude that there is no such revelation, or, that the revelation alluded to is misunderstood, and means no such thing. But if it be asserted, on the authority of revelation, that some Being exists in a manner wholly different from any thing we have experienced in this world, as that three persons are so united as to be in essence one, our experience does not contradict it, so as to justify us in concluding *a priori*, that there can be no such revelation, or no such Being. On the

the contrary, our experience of the vast diversity in the nature of things in this world leaves us room to suppose, such a revelation may be true.

If we believe that God is unchangeable or impassible in his own nature, that is, cannot be affected by any thing from without, being the source of all motion and the great author and governor of all things; we cannot conclude from hence, nor from any experience we have, that he cannot of himself lay aside his glory, descend from heaven, and take the nature of man into union with his own. Our experience of the power of God leads us to conceive, that God can do every thing which does not imply an absolute repugnance to himself, or to the nature of things; and whether this be so, or not, we have not any experience, or principles, on which we can determine any thing about the matter. Only so far we may go, agreeably to experience, in favour of a revelation of such an act of infinite condescension, that, as

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we cannot doubt whether mind can act upon matter, and, as we find in ourselves a thinking power, which must be in its nature wholly different from the gross composition of our bodies; and, as these two natures are so united as to constitute one individual person; it may, therefore, be possible for God and man to be so united as to be one Christ. And if there be declared any end to be answered worthy of such an union, our experience will lead us to think it a probable fact; because we discern, in all the works of God with which we are well acquainted, that there is an exact proportion of their several properties to the end for which they were created; and, because we have never found a single instance in the world of an end to be answered without a suitable mean to accomplish that end.

L E C T U R E V.

P A R T II.

MILTON's description of Adam's sensations, when he first perceived sleep stealing upon him, is perfectly natural, that is, agreeable to what we must think would have been our own feelings in like circumstances. He imagined that he was ceasing to be. When he had lived a day, he could not conclude, by reason, or on this experience, that he should live another day; or, when he had lived a year, that he should always exist. Indeed constant experience of the rising of the sun, day after day, and year after year, makes it so probable to us that the sun will rise to-morrow, that we act upon the presumption, and prepare for a journey, or business, which requires future light and life. But, when we see men go off the stage of life in perpetual suc-

succession, and never one return; this experience may lead us to imagine, that death is the period of our existence: Yet, if any one, pretending to be commissioned by God, declare that God hath appointed that the thinking somewhat, which we call the soul, shall survive the dissolution of the body, and shall exist for ever; and, that in some future period the body itself should rise again, and be animated and actuated by the soul; we have then to consider whether experience forbid the supposition of such a revelation, as of a thing absolutely impossible in itself; or, whether there be sufficient evidence that the person pretending to such a commission from heaven, be an impostor, or not. With respect to the former consideration, it is to be observed, that though experience cannot lead us to a certain assurance of future life on the ground of past and present existence; and, though it might lead us to imagine, that death is the end of man, which it certainly is as to this world; notwithstanding,

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ing, when it is declared, as an article of revelation, that there will be a future state, we may yet find sufficient ground on experience to conclude it to be possible, and even probable; and may recur to experience for a stricter examination of its evidence, and of the verdict which reason gives upon it. If we are certainly persuaded that the revelation is truly divine, we are not obliged to dwell on the former consideration a single moment; for, a revelation from God, who cannot err and will not deceive, affords at once the highest degree of certainty next to actual experience of the thing itself. However there can be no inconvenience in searching for an evidence of the possibility, or probability of the thing revealed, if we do not lose sight of the revelation itself, or make it depend on the probable conjectures of reason; to do which would be quitting a rock to stand on a wave, in which we may chance to sink and our hope to perish.

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Thus, from the faint traces of a moral government discernible in the world; observing, that things in general are naturally tending from a low degree to a higher state of perfection; that, in the present distribution of rewards and punishments, there is an apparent disproportion to the degrees of virtue and vice; that the faculties of the human soul are either not exercised, or do not meet with suitable objects in the present state of things, and never attain the degree of perfection of which they seem capable; we may from hence infer a probability that we shall see a more perfect state of things, and a perfect moral government established in some future world. When, in the early spring, we cast our eyes on the beautiful green of a wheat-field, we may consider that the principles of what we see were wrapt up in the dry corn; that the field had never worn this refreshing verdure, but for the death of the grain, in the dissolution of whose parts the principles of vegetation began to quicken,

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and a new mode of existence to take place. We may compare our own present existence, manner of thinking and reasoning, with that of our childhood; the state of childhood, with that of a foetus in the womb; and may recur to the embryo slumbering in its fire: Now, any supposed state of future existence, to commence at the hour of death, is not more improbable than the several changes we have already experienced: And, when we see, that death in its approaches does not destroy consciousness, but that the faculties of the mind are exercised with the greatest vigor on the death-bed, and even in the very article of dying, and consider that we have already passed from several lower states to higher, we may justly suppose that death is only a crisis, when another and a higher degree of existence will commence.

The objections of ancient philosophers to the resurrection of the body were founded in ignorance of the essential properties of things, and in ignorance of the Almighty power of God.

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God. There are many things in the world, which, if we did not continually see and experience them, would seem equally impossible. For aught we can tell, there may be something in every human body, besides the particular confirmation of parts, which is so essential to it, that one body cannot become an essentially constituent part of another body. But, whatever it be wherein the identity of body consists, he who believes the creation of the worlds, the formation of man, or even considers the inexplicable mystery of generation*, will not think it incredible, that God should raise the dead.

We are indebted to revelation for this train of thinking, which I have just now expressed concerning a future state and the resurrection of the body; for, never did an un-

* Et rem ipsam secum consideranti, quid incredibilius videatur, quam si in corpore non essemus, atque aliquis diceret, ex parva quapiam humani seminis gutta, ossa, et nervos, et carnes, ad eam quam videmus conformata effigiam, fieri posse?

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enlightened heathen; never did a philosopher express himself in this train, before the christian æra. But, to what does it all amount? Why, only this; The soul *may* survive the dissolution of the body; the resurrection is not absolutely incredible; there *may* be a future state of rewards and punishments; and it is even probable there will be such a state. The utmost extent we can go on our experience, or by reasoning from analogy, is into a state of uncertainty in an affair of infinite importance to us. There is indeed an advantage, and a very great advantage truly, to be derived from these probable conjectures of reason, which is in forming this important conclusion, The doctrines of revelation, concerning a future state are credible. If we come to this conclusion, and do not proceed further to a strict attention to the evidences of Christianity, we must be utterly inexcusable. And, when the truth of revealed religion has been evidenced to us, if we then slight the categorical declarations of God's word,

word, and, instead of "Thus saith the Lord", are perpetually arguing on principles of natural religion, what is it otherwise than despising the "chief corner stone", and building a vast fabric on the most slender foundation? Instead of confirming men's minds in the belief of revelation, we induce a suspicion that revelation is not fixed on so firm a foundation as hath been pretended; for this conduct tells them, that God is not to be trusted any further than we can see, or, that any article, which is said to be revealed in the scriptures, is not to be credited, unless it can be proved by natural reason. It is worthy of observation, that they who carry experience beyond its proper limit, which is to shew the credibility of revealed religion, are perpetually altering, with presumptuous hands, the chart, which the great Navigator in the moral world hath given us to direct our course; and they generally form as wrong judgments of the doctrines of revelation as the Savage of a watch, when he determines what it is on

the narrow compass of his experience. Whoever has once seen this chart, and presumes to launch forth without it into the boundless ocean of speculation, may carry an appearance of a regard for truth and virtue, may shew a great deal of ingenuity, and may gain a reputation of wisdom and learning; while indeed he is guilty of the greatest ingratitude, folly, pride, and presumption; and it is a thousand to one, that he founder in sceptical and atheistical philosophy.

Reason is indeed the gift of God, as much as revelation; but, if it be our duty and interest to exert our reason in any degree, it is no less our duty and interest to confine the exercise of it within its proper boundaries. If, like the Jewish lawgiver, it can be made subservient to the gracious designs of Heaven, in emancipating us from vulgar errors, and in conducting us in the affairs of life, while we sojourn in this wide wilderness, let us be thankful for this gift of God; but, let us not disdain to submit to revelation and fol-

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low this divine leader, whom reason itself approves, and who offers to us the fairest prospects of the land of promise, and is ordained to guide us into the possession of sublimer truths and everlasting felicity.

Before I conclude, it may be proper to meet an argument which some have urged against the very idea of a revelation, and which, they conceive, justifies an utter contempt of every thing that can be said in favor of it: They think it unreasonable to suppose that God should have created man in such a state as to make any extraordinary, or supernatural, interposition necessary; as this argues a defect in man's original constitution, which the infinite wisdom and almighty power of the Creator would prevent. But, experience, or matter of fact, will outweigh a thousand arguments of this presumptive kind; and it seems to be very great audacity in us, who know so little of the universal system, and who are so unable to comprehend the plan of providence, which sub-

sists in the infinite mind of our Creator, to say, Why hast thou made us thus? The objection may be as weak as it is immodest; for, a revelation may be necessary to the well-being of every intelligent creature: it might have been impossible for God, to create a Being, who should not feel this very condition of his dependent state. As far as we have clear and distinct ideas of things, so far our knowledge may extend on natural principles, and be certain. But if man be not now in that state in which Providence at first placed him; if his condition require any extraordinary mean for his restoration, that is, which is beyond the reach of our faculties, or to the discovery of which, we have no experience to lead us; in this case, revelation is a grand desideratum, and is absolutely necessary to make known to us the ways of life and salvation.

Let us consider, that what we see, or know, of the natural world, and of the intellectual system, has no proportion to what

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is beyond our comprehension; and, that whatever we can reach with our eyes or thoughts is almost nothing in comparison with the rest. There is not a grain of sand, which has not more in it that we know not, than what we know of its nature, properties, and relations. And if our ignorance almost infinitely exceeds our knowledge; if we are so little acquainted with the nature and properties of things, which are the daily objects of our senses; if instruction be necessary to our present life and enjoyments; we may well imagine, that our condition in relation to another world requires assistance from that world which is not to be found in this. Instead of presuming to determine how God might have constituted the world on some other plan, which might seem better to our foolish wisdom, let us consider how little we understand the plan, which is already in execution, and shun every appearance of arraigning the wisdom of our Creator. Let us consider what is actually our condition in

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regard to the two great objects of revelation, a future state and the means of attaining future happiness. If our experience do not extend one degree, and that the least, into the other world; if we have no natural means to gain a certain knowledge of what is to be hereafter; if we cannot assure ourselves that there will be a future state, and much less that it will be eternal; if, on the view of moral evil, and of our deserving punishment for it, it be impossible for us to discover whether God can ever be fully reconciled to a sinner consistently with his truth and justice as the governor of the world; and, if we have no experience, no example whatever, by which we can discover how this reconciliation may be brought about; then our condition is such, however it came to be such, as to make a revelation necessary to our comfort and hope, and, perhaps, necessary to the enjoyment of that salvation which it reveals to us. When I consider the care which God hath expressed in the
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frame and constitution of things to supply the wants of all his creatures, this want of a revelation, which experience loudly proclaims, is an argument of much weight to persuade me that a revelation has actually been given to mankind; for it cannot be supposed, that he, who has opened his hand and filled all things living with plenteousness, should have left the greatest want unprovided for; and, if all men do not now enjoy the benefit of this revelation, the fault must have been their own apostacy, and not a defect of his goodness.

If men's jealousies, caution, and backwardness to receive revealed truth, did really spring from a fear of being deceived, and because the evidences of the credibility and truth of revealed religion are doubtful, that very fear of being deceived would be a virtue, like that of the Israelite indeed in whose spirit was no guile: But, when I know that the objections, which have been started, are for the most part the offspring of pride and pre-

sumption, and of a real hatred of the light which is come into the world, I feel a great degree of indignation, mixt however with pity for the unhappy Beings, who thus ungratefully requite the tender-mercy of my God. So necessary, so important to us, and so far beyond all we could have looked for, is the object of revelation, the benefit which kind Heaven has bestowed upon us, that I glow with a desire to communicate my own hopes, and feel a wish, greater than I can express, to persuade you to regard the evidences of Christianity. Examine the credibility of revealed religion with candor: Let your minds be open to conviction; and, I am persuaded, you will not long remain in a state of uncertainty, before you will take the cup of salvation with devout gratitude, and will with pleasing hope invoke your God in the name of Jesus Christ.

LECTURE VI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REVELATION.

OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST HATH ABOLISHED DEATH, AND HATH BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL. II TIM. I. X.

MY last address was intended, as an introduction to the subject which comes now before us; and, to engage your attention to the principles, on which the Christian builds his hope of immortality.

We examine the evidences and nature of Christianity; and, in proportion to the degree of attention, with which we investigate the grounds of persuasion; and in proportion to the degree of moral rectitude, or uprightness, with which we wish to disco-

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ver truth; in the same proportion exactly, for so hath God ordained, will the evidences strike our mind, with greater or less force; and, if the heart be disengaged from any contrary bias, they will perfectly assure us of the divine origin and importance of this religion.

The well-attested miracles, by which God hath borne witness to the veracity of his servants, and to the truth of doctrines delivered by them; the completion of prophecies, and the present, daily fulfilling of prophecies, which were delivered many hundred years ago, are no inconsiderable evidences on the side of revelation. But, *The internal Evidence of the christian Religion*, I have confessed* carries with it an authority, which has influenced my mind more than all the external evidences: It was that, which bore down my prejudices, and drove from my heart the infidelity, which for many years, I had unhappily cherished.

* See *A view of the internal Evidence*—by Soame Jenyns Esq.

If the immense fabric of the universe be worthy of God; and, of him alone, as the only architect capable of raising such a stupendous system; if the heavens declare the glory of the incomprehensible Deity; if the silent voice of the unnumbered stars and planets speak in the ear of enlightened reason, "The hand that made us is divine;" if, under the influence of such evidence, it be reasonable, and even necessary to be devout Theists; there is an equal manifestation of God and of his perfections in the Christian religion, evidencing its divine origin, and obliging us by the force of its evidence to be sincere converts to christianity. Indeed it is wholly owing to the imperfection of human nature, that the vast objects in the material world ever strike the mind more forcibly, than the wonders of the intellectual system: but, whoever obtains a faculty to discern spiritual things, which, the Apostle of the Gentiles affirms, the natural man cannot discern, will see a greater perfection and beauty, a richer

a richer display of the divine attributes, a far more exceeding glory, in the mysteries of Christ, than in all other operations of eternal power.

It is more reasonable to suppose, that the arts and sciences, which flourished in ancient Greece, and that the laws of Solon and Lycurgas, were the productions of infants and ideots, than, that the doctrines of christianity were derived from an inconsiderable number of obscure, illiterate fishermen. Even the subtle, and yet monstrous, conceit of Epicurus applied to the scriptures, that in the universe, which contains an infinite variety of motions, and an eternal series of things, there must be, some-where, such a fortuitous concourse of letters, syllables, words, and sentences, as we find in a book called The Bible, is much more credible, than that the doctrines of the bible were the inventions of any set of men whatever; for, they are not only far above the abilities of the greatest geniuses that ever appeared in the
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learned world, but, are absolutely contrary to the disposition and prejudices of human nature: Even, if it were possible for men to invent such a religion, they certainly would not.

There hath been so much deceit and knavery practised under the cloak of religion, that it is fitting we should be on our guard against the impositions of priestcraft; but, in this business, priests had no influence, no concern whatever. And, if the argument were just that Satan cannot cast out Satan, because, it is not in the nature of things, for any intelligent being to act contrary to himself, or wilfully to resist his own interest; priests cannot have had any hand in the contrivance of Christianity; for, there is not in all the writings of Voltaire himself any thing more hostile to the craft, than we find in the whole tenor, and in the special precepts, of the apostolical writings and doctrine; and surely, never did any conduct of men appear

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more unlike the policy of mercenary priests, than that of the ministers of Jesus Christ.

Illiterate peasants and mean mechanics may be as firmly persuaded, that the great God made this world, as any philosopher can be; though they cannot give an account of their belief in a process of logical arguments and deductions: and, the glories of the christian dispensation may shine into their hearts, with equally convincing evidence; though they know little, or nothing, of the evidences of miracles and prophecies. They observe the perfect coincidence of Christianity with the state of the world: It discovers to them the true condition of every thing to which they have any relation; and, It discloses to them the secret workings of their own hearts; by which they believe it is the word of the omniscient God: The authority with which it speaks to their consciences expresses the majesty of Heaven; and they are humbled in the dust before the Judge of all the earth: It exhibits to them
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the only sufficient remedy for all the evils of this miserable state, in which they find themselves involved; and they embrace the remedy, as that, which nothing short of infinite wisdom could contrive, and, which nothing less than eternal mercy can bestow: It affords them a clue to open the mysteries of providence, and reveals the righteous judgments of a holy God; and hence they submit with patience to the divine appointments, however grievous; and obey with cheerfulness the divine commands, however contrary to their lusts and passions.

This revelation, which Christians are certainly persuaded was given by inspiration of God, is the ground of their hope and expectations. They cannot prove, by principles of natural reason, that they have souls capable of a separate state, and which are in their own nature immortal; but, they find, in this revelation, a distinction constantly made between body and spirit, and plain declarations that the souls of men are capable,

through the will and power of God, of surviving the dissolution of their bodies. They are assured that God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness; that all men shall rise again with their own bodies, and give an account of their works; and shall then enter on an everlasting state of happiness, or of misery, according to their several characters, and meet with rewards and punishments in proportion to the quantity of good or evil, found in them.

These are the general outlines of the christian doctrine concerning a future state: but there is one peculiar circumstance, which has not yet been mentioned; and, which is indeed the grand peculiarity of the gospel, the principle on which the resurrection is preached to men, and the ground on which the Christian chiefly builds his hope. The Apostle argues elsewhere, "If there be no resurrection from the dead, then is Christ not risen--but now is Christ risen from the dead"--By this, we are assured it is possible:

possible: what hath been, may be repeated. But the same might have been concluded from the resurrection of other persons; for “many bodies of saints, which slept, arose, and came out of their graves.” It is true; we have not any assurance that they continued to live; and the resurrection of Christ is, therefore, a fuller evidence of it; because he ever liveth: Yet the Christian’s assurance, derived from the resurrection of Christ, rests on another principle. Some consider his resurrection, as a proof that he was the great Prophet of God to reveal the will of Heaven unto men; and others regard it, as an evidence that he is able to fulfil the character of a Redeemer, in raising up all his followers, and a pledge to assure them of this great event: but this is not the whole truth: “We are chiefly bound to praise God for the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord; because he is the very Paschal Lamb, which was offered for us, and hath taken away the sin of the
“ world,

“ world, and, by his death, hath destroyed
 “ death, and, by his rising again hath re-
 “ stored to us everlasting life.”*

Life and immortality are not only brought to light by the gospel, as a revelation of God’s will, that there shall be a future state of rewards and punishments, and of an evidence and pledge of the resurrection, as a possible or certain event: but “ Christ hath “ abolished death †,” hath weakened, broken, and utterly destroyed all its power, rendering it vain and ineffectual. Not to insist now on the perfect zeal he expressed for the divine glory, his perfect submission to the will of God, or his wonderful charity to men, by which the divine law was made to appear practicable, and sin therefore inexcusable; not to urge the depth of his humiliation; the greatness of his sufferings, the agony he endured, or the vio-

* English Ritual.

† Καταργησαντος μὲν τοῦ θανάτου; Nempe per mortem suam. Vid. Heb. ii. 14.

lence

lence of those pains which pressed from him that language of extreme distress, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" — suffice it to say, that he suffered for us, the just for the unjust; and, that the end, which every government proposes in the punishment of transgressors, was answered by the sufferings of Christ; the moral government of God was fully justified, and, the authority of the divine law was established for ever.

But our hope, in view of the great benefit derived to us from the death of Christ, depends on his resurrection. The Apostle argues, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept;" that is, if the fact be not certain that Christ rose from the dead, the Christian's hope in his death must be a groundless conceit; there is then no evidence that "he took away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" or, in other words, that the end, which every government proposes

poses in the punishment of transgressors, was answered by his sufferings: If Christ engaged to redeem man at the price of his blood, dying for sin, then, his resurrection, of which the Christians had no doubt, was a perfect evidence that redemption was complete: It was a formal discharge from death as the wages of sin; and must be considered as a complete victory over it, gained for us, through the gracious will and appointment of Heaven. Thus, "by man came death; " by man came also the resurrection of the " dead;" not as a possible, but as a most certain event. When Christ had taken away sin, as is asserted, by the sacrifice of himself, the very principle, or cause of death was removed; and the divine perfections became engaged to raise him up again; and, are now as certainly engaged to raise up all his faithful people to the enjoyment of eternal life, as ever they were engaged to punish sin, or to raise up Christ, when, by the sacrifice of himself, he had made a complete

complete atonement; and not even a shadow of doubt remains, whether that saying shall be brought to pass, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the Christian's account of the matter in the unsophisticated language of the holy scriptures: This is his triumph: This is the ground of his hope: His hope is as sure and certain, that his "labour shall not be in vain in the Lord," as his belief that Christ himself is risen from the dead. I well know how this must sound to such as have been habituated to philosophical speculations: Yet there is something in this, which challenges their regard: It holds forth a remedy which Philosophy must despair of finding elsewhere. The most sanguine Philosopher, who wishes, with Cicero, to believe the immortality of
the

the soul, cannot be assured of it on his own principles; and, if there be a future state of rewards and punishments, he cannot devise any adequate remedy for moral evil. If sin be estimated by the greatness of the Being offended by it, and by our obligations not to offend that Being, the demerit of sin must exceed the powers of imagination; and whoever is conscious of that demerit, to him the prospect of eternity must be very unpleasant. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin: We cannot hope to flatter the supreme Being, and render him propitious, by the pomps and solemnities of religion: Obedience to one precept cannot atone for the breach of another; or, acting agreeably to the dictates of conscience in some instances cannot atone for any degree of guilt: But here is an object of such magnitude and transcendent worth, that whatever is promised to our hopes may be found here, if the object be real--“ The Prince of life; “ The Lord of glory; The Eternal Life,

“ which

“ which was with the Father; by whom he
“ made the worlds; and, without whom was
“ not any thing made that was made, visible
“ and invisible, Thrones, Dominions, Prin-
“ cipalities, Powers; He, who created all
“ things, and was before all things, and by
“ whom all things subsist, became the head
“ of a mystical body of men, called his
“ Church, and purchased this his Church
“ with his own blood.”

I admit the justness of the exclamation,
How can these things be! and subjoin, that
ignorance is not an argument against the re-
ality of things which are said to exist. Rea-
son is so unable to solve the difficult question,
How moral evil, or even natural evil, was
introduced into the creation of a perfectly
wise, good, and almighty Being, that it is
not to be expected she should be a perfect
judge of the remedy for evil. And, most
certainly, it can never be proved by reason,
that the voluntary sufferings of an innocent
person cannot, in any case, or in any cir-
cumstances

cumstances whatever, be accepted for the guilty. If the ends of government can be as well answered, by the sufferings of that innocent person, as by the condign punishment of the guilty; and if a full compensation, or reward, for those sufferings, be an object in view, it is not contrary, even to our ideas of justice, that such a commutation should take place. And this is said to be the case here: The glory of God is a reason sufficient to justify the divine procedure; and the resurrection of Christ, and of all his followers, and the eternal blessedness to be obtained thereby, is undoubtedly an adequate reward for the travail of the Redeemer's soul: This was "the joy set before him," for which we are told, he endured the pains of the cross, and despised the shame of it.

LECTURE VI.

PART II.

PERHAPS an unlimited, unconditional act of mercy, however great a blessing it may seem to us in our present state of imperfect knowledge, would be no blessing to man; and might be absolutely inconsistent with that constitution of things, which infinite wisdom thought fit to establish, when the world was created. If it be necessary to the happiness of a sinful creature, to reduce him to a state of humble dependence on God, and to make him feel infinite obligation to his Maker, such an act of mercy would prevent his happiness; because, in this case, he would want a medium to discover the great evil of sin, and to gain an idea of the mercy to which he is supposed to

to be indebted : It would be little better than bidding him be happy in an object, of which he is ignorant, and the attributes of which he hath no means ever to know, so as to love and enjoy the object for them. But, through the mediation of Christ, sin is made to appear what it is ; and yet, the penitent sinner is preserved from despair ; the mercy of God is revealed in the most glorious manner, and the believing sinner can never presume upon it. In short, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is given unto us in the face of Jesus Christ ; and, so as to change us into the same image from glory to glory.

Christians will inform you, that man, in his first and innocent state, could not assure himself that he should not cease to be ; and, that God, who had made him capable of religious knowledge, condescended to assure him of eternal life, and instructed him how that life might be a blessing to him by preserving his state of dependence on God and

of obedience to him; and, that the gracious Creator planted fear in the heart of man, as the guardian of his virtue, by shewing him that death would be the consequence of sin (which it must be to every creature, as certainly as a dagger in the heart is death to the body) and declared, that he would inflict it, as the just punishment of disobedience. Now, if such a moral constitution, or government, were really established, and it is perfectly reasonable* to suppose it, then, without some such remedy as that which the gospel exhibits, man could not be saved; for the truth and justice of God stand, as with a drawn sword, to oppose the sinner and cut off his hope: And thus it *became* him, for whom are all things, to make the captain of men's salvation perfect through sufferings, as the

* Let it be considered, that a moral government can no more be exercised without a law, than without subjects: And it is not conceivable, how a government can exist without a possibility of sinning against that government, or be maintained without the punishment of sin.

way

way to bring them to glory; and thus the redemption by Christ was necessary to *declare* God's *righteousness*, that he might be *just*,* or appear so, when he pardons the sinner and receives him to favor and eternal life. We read in the scriptures, that sin and death derive all their strength from *The Law*; by which term, some original constitution of universal influence must be meant; because it is not possible for sin and death to destroy the whole human race by the force of any partial institution, or law given to a single tribe or nation.

But, after all, it may be too soon for man to triumph in the prospect of eternal life; since Christ did not so die for all men, as that all without exception shall infallibly be saved. It is true; the certainty, which the Christian hath of salvation, is not the certainty, which is obtained by mathematical demonstration, or by actual experience of the thing itself; yet, it is such as may af-

* Rom. iii. 26.

ford perfect satisfaction to his mind: He has the highest degree of moral certainty that can possibly be. The interposition of Christ is the foundation on which his hopes rest; and, his hopes are supported on this foundation by the truth and power of God. The land of Canaan was given by promise unto the Jews; and it then rested on the truth and power of the Almighty, to put the posterity of Abraham into the actual possession of that country. And, we are told, God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that, by two immutable things in which it was not possible for God to lie, they might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them: Christians, therefore, have this hope, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for them entered, even Jesus their eternal High-Priest.

M

Anc,

And, whereas this is a salvation for *sinners**, as such; and, beings in the hands, I will not say of an infallible Mediator, but, of a Mediator, who hath actually fulfilled his engagements to God on their behalf; and, whereas God hath, in consequence, freely promised and given eternal life to men in Christ Jesus, and commanded the gospel of this salvation to be preached to every creature under heaven capable of receiving it, without any consideration of their merits, but on view of their demerits, supposing them all guilty before God; it is therefore within our reach, and infallibly sure to all that believe. No impossible, no hard conditions are proposed; but salvation itself is proposed even to our acceptance. “Whoever will, may take the water of life freely”: and, to every penitent sinner; to every one, who anxiously enquires What must I do to be saved? The answer is plainly this; “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Tim. i. 15.

“ and

“and thou shalt be saved”. Whoever, therefore, is conscious that he truly repents and believes the gospel, must, in the very view of this salvation, be certainly assured of it.

And that virtue, which this certain hope inspires, as it is the proper qualification for eternal life, is likewise the earnest and sure pledge, that the Christian’s hope shall not deceive him; for it does not consist with the nature, the word, or will, of God, to exclude from heaven any creature, who is qualified for it.

I should not faithfully represent the principles on which the Christian’s expectation is founded, were I not to mention The union with Christ, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, which the Mediator received after his resurrection; and, which subsists by divine appointment, ordaining that all believers shall have one interest with Jesus. This union is represented in the parable of the vine and branches, and is more explicitly declared in the Lord’s prayer; “That they

“ who believe on me may be one, as thou
“ Father art in me and I in thee; that they
“ also may be one in us. I in them, and
“ thou in me, that they may be made per-
“ fect in one”. If then such an union sub-
sists, all true Christians will assuredly attain
unto the resurrection from the dead, with-
out whom Christ mystical will not be com-
plete: “ When Christ, who is their life,
“ shall appear, they also must appear with
“ him in glory”. In the epistle to the Ro-
mans, St. Paul declares that the very bodies
of the saints are united to Christ by the Holy
Spirit, and maintains the resurrection of their
bodies on this principle: “ If the Spirit of
“ him that raised up Jesus from the dead
“ dwell in you; he that raised up Christ
“ from the dead shall also quicken your mor-
“ tal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in
“ you.”

These are the principles on which the
Christian's hope is built--A revelation of a
future state--Redemption in the blood of
Christ,

Christ--The resurrection of Christ from the dead--The promises of God who cannot lie--The power of the almighty Creator--The gracious appointment of this salvation for sinful men--The holy qualification of believers for the enjoyment of heaven--and, their Union with the great Head of the Church. These are principles, which reason could never discover, and, which cannot have been derived from any other source, than that Fountain of light, to which they are designed to lead us. If you have been accustomed to regard Christianity only as a system of pure morality, these principles must appear very extraordinary to you. You cannot, however, deny the importance of the doctrine of a future state, which rests upon them; and sure I am, it is your interest to believe if you can; for a better foundation cannot be laid for the hope of eternal life, than these principles of the Christian religion. You are entreated not to reject them without further examination: And, if, in general,

the doctrine of a future state hath gained your assent, the importance of it demands your most serious and constant regard. The politics of statesmen, the commercial interests of republicks, and the fate of kingdoms, are trifling concerns, compared with the eternal salvation of any one individual person. If God has made us accountable creatures, and has determined, that every one of us shall give an account of himself to God; if he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness; to lose sight of God, for the sake of the little unimportant concerns of this present world; to forget ourselves, the everlasting state we must soon enter upon; and, to disregard the solemn account we must one day give; is the greatest iniquity, folly, and madness. Were a man obliged to quit his native land, to sail over the wide-extended ocean, in order to settle in some distant part of the earth; and, instead of providing for his voyage and new settlement in an unknown province, should spend

spend his whole time in engagements of the country, to which he must soon bid adieu for ever—or, should he wholly amuse himself with picking up shells and pebbles from the shore, instead of preparing for his voyage, while the ship, in which he must take his passage, prepared or not, only waits the wind to set her sails, and launch forth; how would you blame his folly, his thoughtless, improvident behaviour! But, how much more blame-worthy is the conduct of men, who must soon leave this world, and pass into the boundless ocean of eternity, and must enter upon a new, and that an unchangeable state; and yet are wholly engaged by the things of time, and will not prepare for the eternal world. Be persuaded then to pay a proper regard to your eternal interests, compared with which, all the business and politicks of the kingdoms of this earth are to you, less than nothing.

If you are indeed earnestly engaged in this affair; if you are sensible of the mischief and

ruin, which moral evil is producing in God's creation ; then, remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead : Seek a more perfect understanding of this mystery of our redemption : Be assured, that the Son of God died to make an atonement for us, and was raised again for our justification : Be persuaded that God hath given you eternal life in his son : Consider that Almighty power, which is able to perform more than you can ask or think : And, be assured that nothing can exclude you from heaven, but your own wilful impenitence and obstinate unbelief. Admit Christ into your hearts, as a sure and certain hope of glory ; and, look for that glory on the principles of Christianity : Expect it day by day. Let not the world, nor the thought of your unworthiness, however great it be, as a dark cloud, intercept your views, obscure your expectations, damp your hopes, or quench your desires of eternal life. It is the Christian's privilege to triumph in Christ Jesus ; to live in hope, and to die in peace.

Fight

Fight then the good fight of faith; Let it ever be maintained in your consciences, as a first principle, as an undoubted matter of fact, that Christ hath fully redeemed you. And, let this be your song in the house of your pilgrimage, "Blessed be the God and Father
" of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according
" to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us
" again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an
" inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled,
" and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are kept by the power of
" God through faith unto salvation."

You have read, or heard, of the holy lives of the primitive Christians; how they despised honors, riches, power; broke through all the entanglements of vice; faced a frowning world; and, triumphed over death in its most dreadful forms. You see modern Christians, and, perhaps, find yourselves, almost infinitely removed from their zeal, piety, charity, patience. You inquire,

quire, Why does not the belief of the same gospel produce the same effects now? It does produce those effects; but, in general, that gospel is not believed. The multitudes, who are called Christians, do not believe that Jesus Christ died, and rose again, in that respect in which the gospel sets forth his death and resurrection. The primitive Christians, believed in Jesus as their life, their all-victorious Saviour, their everlasting friend: They therefore lived in a sure and certain hope of a resurrection to life: Their souls were filled with the expectation of glory: Heaven was their home; and not earth; the country of their hearts. This was the ground of all that you have seen in them so superior to any thing you discern in modern Christians, or find in yourselves. They were meek, humble, charitable, patient; and “took joyfully
“ the spoiling of their goods, knowing that
“ in heaven they had a better and a more enduring substance.”

Men

Men commonly mistake at the very foundation: They take it for granted that they believe in Christ, when their faith is mere opinion, and expect a good life will be the consequence; and, perhaps, make some efforts to practise christian virtues. They are disappointed; yet, ignorant of the cause, they imagine that stronger efforts will give them better success; but are still disappointed. The expectation must ever fail, and such efforts prove ineffectual, if the foundation of faith in Christ be not well secured. The tree must be made good, before the fruit of the Spirit can appear and ripen to perfection. The scholar, from whom an assent to Christianity as a divine revelation is extorted by credible evidences, should know that his faith, which leaves his heart unchanged, is not the faith of God's elect: And, the generality of people, who call themselves Christians, should be informed, that their belief is the prejudice of education, and as far removed from faith in Christ as the prejudice of a Mahometan.

metan. Surely that faith, by which men are no better than whited sepulchres, or mere formalists in christian practices, which consists with loving the world and the things of the world, and indeed with the practice of almost every vice, cannot be the faith to which the scriptures attribute such great things: Yet, this is evidently the faith of most people high and low, of men of education, and of illiterate peasants and mechanics.

Ask a real Christian, how he came to believe in Christ: If he have a faculty to express himself, he will tell you, that necessity pressed him to it. He knew that he had sinned against the great God, and, not merely through the violence of external temptation; but, from an evil principle in his nature. He knew that he ought to adore and love that most perfect Being, who is the Creator of all things; but, he found the persuasions of reason ineffectual; he could not love God. He ought to acknowledge him in all his ways, and live to him who gave him Being; but
his

his heart, will, and affections rebelled against the obligation of perfect subjection to the divine government and glory. He could not imagine it possible for the holy and righteous God to look on him with favor, to accept and bless him: He conceived that the God of truth must condemn him; that his perfect justice would never deal with any creature contrary to the truth of things, or contrary to his merit as a sinful creature; and, therefore, if there be an eternity for him, he must be eternally undone. He could not discover, by any principles of reason, any foundation for hope, which could give him satisfaction. But the gospel preaches peace; to sinful man, eternal peace. Necessity, and that the greatest, pressed him to examine into the nature and evidences of the Christian religion. He was convinced of its divine origin, and embraced the hope of the gospel, as life from the dead. This faith changed his prospects; his conscience was relieved; his heart was cleansed: his
faith

faith did that for him immediately, which the rules of moralists, and the mortifications of religionists, can never effect at all: He was made at once both happy and holy. This is the christian regeneration. The whole need not a physician: And, they who have never known what a wounded spirit means, and, who have never been self-condemned, cannot understand the importance of the gospel, nor feel that attachment to Jesus, which is implied in believing.

Whoever truly believes in Jesus Christ will find the life of sin destroyed. He cannot any longer live in sin, who believes that he is so gloriously redeemed from it. "How shall we, who are dead to sin", by the death of Christ wholly redeemed from its destroying power, "live any longer therein?" Most certainly, "if we have been planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection," restored to God in newness of life. Then, let the careless, the worldly-minded,

minded, the formal, the proud, impatient, and quarrelsome; the unmerciful, the lewd, and sensual; the disputing, domineering, and the rebellious politician; and all who mind earthly things, consider that they are essentially deficient. They have not the mind of Christ, nor walk as he walked, because they do not yet believe in him. Beware of that fatal mistake, in thinking you have faith, because you have some speculative, and orthodox opinions. Never imagine your faith is right, while your heart and life are unchristian. Think not, that you only want to amend your morals. You have not yet believed in Jesus: You have not once entered into the sheep-fold by Christ the door of the sheep. You must be led to Jesus, through the knowledge of yourselves, and in the right knowledge of him by faith: When this is accomplished, then the life also of Jesus will be manifested in your mortal bodies, while, in believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

LECTURE VII.

HUMILITY.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT;
FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF
HEAVEN. MATT. V. 3.

THE glory of God is the end* for which all things are, and were created. The material worlds contribute to this great design, in a low degree. They are necessary, not merely as places of habitation, for finite, intellectual beings; but, as means, to furnish them with ideas: for, it is only through the medium of his works, that a creature can know the invisible God; and, perhaps, any degree of knowledge would be impossible to finite beings, without external, material ob-

* The *quodvis simplex duntaxat et unum* of the Universe.

jects. There is not a beast, or tree; a mountain, or valley, which is not, in a greater or less degree, necessary to man for his attainment of moral truth. The various shapes, and tempers, and proportions of bodily and mental strength of the inferior animals are necessary, to give him some idea of perfection. Even, without the darkest shades, which, by themselves, strike the mind with horror, light and beauty, truth and goodness could not be perceived and enjoyed. The material worlds, therefore, in all their vast variety, are necessary to the existence of the intellectual system, and to the exercise of that moral government, in which the divine perfections shine forth, to the great Creator's praise.

That part of God's moral government, the redemption of man, is, in the system to which we belong, the chief of all his works, designed to manifest the divine perfections in the most perfect degree, and to produce the greatest quantity of moral good. Into

N

this

this mirror, Angels desire to look, that they may discern "the manifold wisdom of God;" and "the memorial of his abundant kindness is shewed, that men may sing of his righteousness. All thy works praise thee, Lord; and thy saints give thanks unto thee. They shew the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; that thy power, thy glory, and mightiness of thy kingdom might be known unto men."

The beauty of creation, and the evidence that the world is the workmanship of the one, living, and true God, consists in a unity of design in the midst of an endless variety. Whatever harmonizes with the universal tendency of things, to promote the divine glory, is of God; and, whatever is inconsistent with the general plan of providence is evil. If the precepts of the gospel did not exactly correspond with the law of creation, *Let all things serve God*, or with the universal principles of government, there would be reason to reject them, as the inventions and impositions

positions of designing, or superstitious men. But, there is in them, so perfect an agreement with the universal system; such an union with the amazing variety of things to promote the end, for which all things are; and, at the same time, they so perfectly accord with the redemption of man by Jesus Christ, and with that state of future existence, to which Christ hath redeemed us, that this very agreement, or union, is a proof of their divine original.

The first precept of the Christian religion, with which all other precepts accord, and, as it were, grow out of it, commands the heart. Be consistent with yourselves, and with all things to which you stand related-- Know your place and station in the Universe-- Consider what you are; and, put on the temper and disposition suitable to your character--in other words, BE HUMBLE; BE YE CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY.

Humility is a disposition of mind suitable to every creature. It is a temper, as pro-

per for angels, as for men. It is fit, that they should have a just estimation of themselves, and of whatever relates to them; that they should know, and keep their station in that rank of beings, in which they are placed; and regard themselves as creatures of God's power and goodness, and dependent on his sovereign will and government. But humility appears with different aspects and qualities, according to the circumstances under which it is exercised. When our Saviour said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, he was instructing the sons and daughters of men, that is, sinful beings: And the poverty of spirit, which is proper for men, does not respect their dependent state, simply as creatures; but, their state of dependence on the grace and mercy of God, as depraved and guilty creatures,

The truly humble man stands before God condemned, ashamed and confounded, in sight of his own moral deformity: He wonders at the patience and goodness of God; and,

if

if he understand* the way of salvation by Christ Jesus, his humiliation for sin brings him to confession; prevents the rising of any lofty thoughts of his own merits; any hopes of ever *deserving* mercy; and leads him to the cross for pardon, acceptance, and grace.

There is an example in Scripture, which describes his humble posture of soul, better than it can be defined by words. "The Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up
" so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote
" upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to
" to

* Otherwise, guilt will prevent an ingenuous confession.

† That the Publican knew the way of salvation, through a mediator, or is represented in the parable as knowing it, is sufficiently evident. In the temple, sacrifices were offered for sin---typical sacrifices, no doubt---and, in the Holy of Holies, there was the Propitiation, upon which the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled on the great day of atonement; and on which was an appearance, either the real, or an emblematical, presence of God: Here the Publican sought mercy; and, in reference to the propitiatory sacrifices, and to the Propitiation itself, and the divine presence *there* manifested,

“to me a sinner”. This example appears to greater advantage, by standing in comparison with another, which represents a person full of self-conceit, and vainly boasting his own merits. “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself; God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortio-

nifested, he prayed *ἱλασθῆναι μοι*; which, in the explicit language of the christian dispensation, was praying for mercy *through Christ*, that by the merits and death of our Saviour, and through faith in his blood, he might obtain remission of sins, and all other benefits of his passion. “*ἱλασχομαι*” maxime convenit illi placationi, seu reconciliationi, quæ fit inter Deum et homines, offerendo sacrificium, seu hostiam ad obtinendam peccati remissionem.

“*ἱλασμος*, 1 John ii. ver. 2. and iv. 10. significat et peccatorum expiationem, et ipsam propitiationem, seu, id quo, et propter quod tum peccata expiantur, et consequenter Deus placatur.

“*ἱλαστηριον*, Heb. ix. 9. proprie notat instrumentum propitiationis, seu placationis, ac proinde optime in Christum quadrat, per quem Pater nobis placatus est. The Propitiatory, or Mercy-seat, Heb. ix. which name Paul giveth to Christ, Rom. iii. 25. who is the true Propitiation for our sins.” *Leigh Crit. Sac.*

“ners,

"ners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this
 "Publican. I fast twice in the week; I
 "give tithes of all that I possess".---The
 Pharisee had not any degree of the temper,
 which was suitable to his real character: And,
 it is impossible that any two things should be
 more opposite to each other, than the temper
 of his soul was, at that time, opposite to truth
 and to God. On the other hand, the Pub-
 lican could not be thrust lower than he lay,
 or be in any predicament more agreeable to
 the truth of things. This man, therefore,
 went down to his house justified, and not the
 other.

Considering the condition of human na-
 ture, and the redemption by Christ, it is as
 impossible to become a real Christian with-
 out poverty of spirit, as to be a man with-
 out animal life: And, whatever unfitness
 there might have been, for God to pardon
 sinners without Christ, there can *now* be no
 less to pardon them without humility. Is it
 possible, in the nature of things, that a man

should ever ask for mercy, or accept it, who is not humbled under a sense of his sinfulness? And, can we suppose, that mercy will be extended to him, who presumes he does not want mercy? that the careless, who have no desire to obtain it; or, the impenitent, whose temper and conduct deny the charge of guilt, and impeach the justice of God in condemning and punishing sinners, will even be justified by the God of truth, who never acts contrary to the reason and fitness of things? Will the God of truth deny himself, and allow our lie? Will he bestow that mercy, of which we have no idea, and for which we cannot be thankful? will he give that grace, which we are not prepared to accept, and of which we cannot make a right use? Hath God given his Son to suffer for us, to die for sin, as a ransom for the soul, and will he now pardon those, whose very frame of mind and conduct are an impeachment of his wisdom and goodness, and an emphatical declaration that Christ died in vain? Shall the death

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of Christ be a consideration, for which life shall be given to those, who are full of presumption, and trust in their own merits and righteousness, as a sufficient reason for God to bestow upon them immortality, i. e. who set up a claim in opposition to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ? It cannot be--surely, it cannot be. We must be brought low; and be made poor in spirit, before God will, and it may be said, before he *can* exalt and enrich us with his grace. He resisteth the proud, and the proud only---stands as an adversary against the unhumble, and presumptuous, self-conceited, self-justifying, and giveth grace unto the lowly.

There is a congruity in the character of of a man, who is poor in spirit, to obtain and enjoy mercy and grace. The empty and hungry soul has a capacity for being filled; can feel a sense of obligation, and ascribe the praise, which is due, to his God and Saviour. Every obstacle to his salvation is for ever removed. His past sins can be no impediment

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to his peace and safety; for "Christ hath taken away sin, by the sacrifice of himself;" and God, who willeth not the death of a sinner, who is rich in mercy, and even delighteth in mercy, both can and will pardon, justify, and save him---He is, and shall be blessed. "Thus saith the High and Lofty One, "that inhabiteth eternity, whose name "is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones---To this man will I look, even "to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, "and trembleth at my word."

It is not in the single instance of suing for pardon, that the truly humble man expresses his lowly thoughts; but, consistently with himself and the truth of things, he walks humbly with his God, in every circumstance in which he can be placed. He considers himself as one, whom mercy only permits to live and hope; and, therefore, conscious that
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a guilty creature deserves evil, and not good, he receives every blessing, as an act of mercy, with thankful acknowledgment of unmerited favor. If Providence withholds any comforts, he is not discontented in a state of poverty and want; because he is poor in spirit, and considers that a sinner, who yet possesses hope, is in a situation truly happy beyond desert. If blessings are bestowed, and again taken away, he parts with them without repining, and suffers any loss, any pain, without a murmur; for, how should a living man complain, who suffers far less than his iniquity deserves? Whatever talents he is endowed with, health or strength, learning or riches, honor or power, he does not consider them as his own; but, as a trust, to be used to God's glory and the good of his fellow creatures. This, indeed, he ought to do, as an intelligent being, created for God; but, much more, is he obliged to it, and disposed to do so, by the consideration of his being bought with a price, redeemed from

from utter ruin, that he may glorify God in his soul and body. Instead of being puffed up by any distinctions, he reflects how unworthy he is of them, how unable to bear them with propriety, and how little he glorifies God by them: He rather fears, than rejoices in them; and is humble under a sense of his imperfections, desiring the mercy of God to pity and pardon him. He sees vanity and insufficiency in every earthly thing; that he has nothing in all the world to make him happy; that sin has brought a curse upon all worldly possessions; and, that every thing will prove a snare and curse to him, unless sanctified to his use, by the special blessing of God through his great Mediator. He knows that, through him, even affections, poverty and want, persecutions, sickness, and death, may become blessings to him; and, therefore, feels equally dependent on the divine favour in prosperity and adversity. He finds himself in the midst of snares and temptations, and, which is worst of all, in danger

danger continually of proving his own, his greatest foe: He perceives, that he is without wisdom to observe, and without strength to resist his spiritual adversaries; and, experience has taught him, that he must be overpowered and finally undone, unless God Almighty help, support, and save him. Insufficient to be, in any degree, his own Saviour, the worker of his own wealth and happiness, he depends wholly on him, who hath said "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is perfected in weakness." He knows, that without the external means of grace, he had remained ignorant of God and of himself; and he attributes to the special favour of Heaven, and not to his own deserving, or procuring, that he has the means to be happy: And, that he has, in any degree, profited by the means, he ascribes it to the God of all power and grace, who called him by them to his eternal kingdom and glory: He imputes his own virtues to the favour of his God and Saviour, acknowledging that he

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can do nothing good by his own power, unless assisted by the over-ruling influence of God. If he has served God in any eminent degree, he knows "who made him to differ from "another," that he has nothing but what he received, and that he has done nothing by his own wisdom and strength: therefore, with St. Paul, who laboured more abundantly than all the other apostles, he adds to the account of his labours; "Yet, not I; but the "grace of God which was with me." He reflects what he was, and is, in himself; what, without the grace of Jesus and the mercy of God; and, what he will yet be, if left to himself; and sees that he is the poorest wretch imaginable, without any thing to call his own properly, his depravity only excepted; and therefore has nothing to boast of; for he never was, is, or can be any thing good, further than grace and mercy make him to be. The more he receives, the more obliged he feels himself: The weight of his vast obligations

tions presses him down, and lays him still lower in humility.

“ Sit down in the lowest room”-----There you will find the true Christian: There God finds, and enriches him with his grace; and there, in the same posture of soul, will he be found in the day of judgment. Still poor in spirit, he will admire the grace and mercy of his God. When his virtues shall be mentioned, to justify the approbation of his judge, astonished that any thing he has done should be taken notice of, he will exclaim, When did I see thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? or naked, and clothed thee? or sick and in prison, and visited thee?---He will then be bidden to come up higher; and when the crown of glory shall be placed on his head, still conscious of his own unworthiness, still adoring his great benefactor's munificence, filled with a sense of infinite obligation, rejoicing that there is such a Being as God at the head of creation, and perfectly satisfied with his own
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ferior station, as a creature wholly dependent, he will fall down in lowest prostration before him who sitteth on the throne of glory (for so the scripture represents the happy state of the redeemed) and, worshipping him that liveth for ever and ever, will cast his crown before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.

The state of human nature is such, that we must be indebted for salvation to foreign merit and assistance. This condition of things necessarily excludes boasting. A way of salvation for sinful men, through a mediator, requires humility. It is a way, into which we cannot enter, and in which we cannot proceed one step, without lowly thoughts of ourselves. In the very nature of things it is impossible; and the happiness, which is the end of salvation, or the completion of it, is such, that, without this grace, we can never share in it. Humility is the proper qua-

lification for heaven. A proud man can never sing the song of the redeemed; that is, he can never feel their sense of obligation, and therefore cannot know their joy. Humility is the only frame of mind, which can reconcile us to God and the whole creation. The unhumiliated sinner is at variance with the universe; who, while all things cry, Let God be glorified, either seeks to justify and exalt himself, or totally disregards every concern, but that of private gratification.

When men hear a general description of humility, how reasonable, and how lovely it is, they presently approve; and self-love mistakes the approbation of virtue for virtue itself. They are ignorant of the natural pride of their hearts; and consider not, that this good and perfect gift must be received from heaven. All the persuasions of reason will no more change the heart, or make a man humble, than they will take off one cubit from his stature.

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Many love the humble man, but not humility. If they loved the grace of humility for its own sake, they would be humble. They can like a man of a self-diffident, modest deportment, because they themselves are proud, and feel a consciousness of superiority, while the lowly man is content to sit beneath them.

When contemplative men view the stars, which sparkle in the heavens, they imagine an infinite host of suns, with their innumerable sets of planets, or worlds: They then enlarge the idea, and suppose another heaven of suns and worlds rising still above this which they behold; and these still enlightened by a superior firmament of luminaries. The immensity of creation fills the mind with astonishment. Tired imagination stretches itself in vain through immeasurable regions; and the philosopher returns to reflect upon himself, and the little insignificant figure which he bears in the immensity of God's works. "I cannot, he says, but look upon myself
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“ with secret horror, as not worth the smallest regard of the Supreme Being.” This sentiment of Mr. Addison is equally suitable to the character of Epicurus. Indeed, the very essence of the Epicurean atheism consists in it. It is the humility of a philosopher, not that of a man who is a sinner. It has relation to the works of God, rather than to God himself; has the quantity, extent, and proportion of space and matter for its object, and not the moral perfections of the Deity. Some gentlemen are very much pleased to cherish this sentiment, and call it walking humbly with God: But, there is no more moral virtue in it, than in the astonishment of a school-boy, when he stands gazing on the mighty elephant.

There is, what St. Paul called, A voluntary humility; which is no other than a disguised pride. It appears in an ostentatious profession of humility; in an affected preciseness; in abstinence from pleasures; in an austere and rigid discipline: “ Touch not;

“taste not; handle not.” A deformed coquet seeks, in the richness and fancy of her dress, to appear with those charms which nature has denied her: While a truly modest and graceful woman is negligent of dress, and wishes to hide, rather than expose the real beauties of her person. The sincere Christian would not appear, but be humble. He would conceal his other virtues under the cover of humility, like a dark veil cast over rich attire, which hides all the glare, and makes none itself: But, when his other virtues appear under the modest grace of genuine humility, for always concealed they cannot be, they then appear more lovely to the eye, and are most esteemed.

Some make all their religion to consist in noisy profession. They will be heard and taken notice of. They invent nice distinctions, oppose, dispute, and preach, and make long prayers, to gain a degree of importance among their brethren: But, to sit in silence; to be learners; to possess some obscure cor-

ner in the church; to lie concealed under a profession of Christianity; to be unnoticed, or esteemed as nothing---this hurts their pride; and is a sort of humility, which, to hide their own forwardness from deserved censure, they will call a want of zeal, or lukewarmness. Some preach Christ of envy and strife; and the most humbling confessions are often a lure to catch the praise of men.

Humility is a virtue purely christian. Pagan moralists knew nothing of it, either in theory or practice. So far from it, they nourished the directly opposite temper, pride. And we are in danger, from a classical education, to imbibe their spirit; to conceive false ideas of virtue and honor; and to despise humility, as a vicious, contemptible meanness. We may, indeed, appear of consequence without it, in the eye of men as vain and ignorant as ourselves: But without humility, we cannot have any true virtue, or be acceptable in God's sight. He esteems it of great price. He, who was higher than
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the higheft of all created beings, ftrooped the loweft, made himfelf of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a fervant. And, in his church, next to Chrift himfelf, he is greateft, who moft humbles himfelf as a little child, and becomes fervant to all men. A true chriitian knows his own heart, his own infirmity, his own guilt and unworthinefs, much more than thofe of his brethren; he can therefore efteem others better than himfelf: and, if he feels moft fenfibly his own obligations to divine mercy, will be content to ftyle himfelf Lefs than the leaft of all faints, and be ready to wafh the feet of his Lord's fervants.

It is a right knowledge of God, and of ourfelves, which produces humility. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye feeth thee; wherefore I repent, and abhor myfelf in duft and afhes." Let us confider what we are with refpect to the holy and righteous God; and compare our hearts and lives with his law:
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Let us open our eyes to view our guilt, our depravity, weakness, insufficiency. Let us not be afraid to be humble. It is not only the way to be exalted in a future state; but, to be safe and happy, so far as is possible in such a state of things, to be safe and happy in the present world.

The proud man is apt to be discontented with his lot; to be impatient and restless; to think himself hardly dealt with, when he suffers; and to say, in view of his depravity, 'Why hast thou made me thus?' He blasphemes the judgments, which, he certainly knows, his limited faculties cannot comprehend. Though self-conceited, there is a worm at bottom, which gnaws the root of his hope, and makes it wither: He often suspects that he is not good enough, and foreboding apprehensions of the righteous judgments of the Almighty fill him with sad disquietudes. From men, he meets with less respect than he challenges, as due to his quality, rank, or merit: His spirits are often ruffled, and quarrels

quarrels ensue. Confident in his own powers, he meets temptations, which he cannot resist. The higher he erects his head, the more exposed to the storms of life: and, when he falls, the more dreadful is his ruin; for the more unsubdued his spirit, the more wretched must he be for ever.

Let any one, on the other side, consider the state of the humble man; how perfectly he is at one with the whole universe; how little exposed to misery; how safe and happy he is, and must be for ever; and he will, doubtless, say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

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THE END.

